

***“All The Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues”:***  
**[Post]Oedipal Fatherhood And**  
**Subjectivity In ABC’s *Lost***

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*To My Mother,  
Whom I will always love and remember*

## **A b s t r a c t**

ABC's popular television series *Lost* has been praised as one of the most innovative programs in the history of broadcast television primarily due to its unique storytelling content and structure. In this thesis, I argue that in spite of its unconventional stances in terms of narrative, genre, and character descriptions, *Lost* still conforms to the conventional understanding of family, fatherhood, and subjectivity by perpetuating the psychoanalytic myth of the Oedipus complex. The series emphasizes the centrality of the father in the lives of the survivors, and constructs character developments according to Freud's essentialist and phallogocentric conception of subjectivity. In this way, it continues the classic psychoanalytic tradition that views the father as the essence of one's identity. In order to support this argument, I conduct a discursive reading of the show's two main characters: Jack Shepherd and John Locke. Through such a reading, I explore and unearth the mythic/psychoanalytic importance of the father in the psychology of these fictional constructs.

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# 1

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## INTRODUCTION

In Fall, 2009, the producers of ABC's *Lost* (September, 2004 – May, 2010) launched an advertising campaign that enabled fans of the program to enroll in the fictitious *Lost University*, an online, promotional university where students can partake in online courses that delve into issues and themes central to the narrative of the show. The university includes classes such as "Philosophy 101: I'm Lost, Therefore I am," "Physics 101: Introductory Physics of Time Travel," and "History 101: Ancient Writing on the Wall." Through these courses, fans of the program are able to read, examine, and discuss some of the myths and ideas that underpin the mysteries of the *Lost* universe. Among the more serious of the courses offered is "Psychology 201: Self Discovery Through Family Relationships," which offers fans the ability to discuss "the complex relationships explored on the show," and "break down and explore how character's choices are influenced by their family or childhood experience" ("PSY 201").

The ideas of family and self examined through this promotional course highlight the wider discussion of family relationships that are central to my analysis of *Lost* in this thesis. I am generally interested in exploring the intimate and complex relationship of the subject with parental figures: how familial conflicts of childhood, even of adulthood, continue to exert profound influences on the psychology of the *Lost* characters and how these conflicts dictate the shape of their quests on the island. The castaways' familial

histories that are revealed through their flashbacks become the major motivating factor for their later development both on and off the island.

In my thesis, I am particularly interested in exploring the father figure and how father-child conflicts in the series play a significant role in the formation and position of the characters' subjectivity. In *Lost*, most castaways are depicted as having had unpleasant experience involving either their own fathers, or themselves in the father role. As Kat Sanchez writes in her column, "*Lost*, as a whole, has not been kind to the father figure." In the show, fathers are notoriously bad at sustaining their ties with their children. Most of them are absent and the ones that are not are portrayed as unloving, negligent, or tyrannical. For example, the protagonist Jack Shepherd (Matthew Fox) has a contentious relationship with his father, who is often too strict and rigid to be of any emotional support to his son. His partner on the island, Kate Austen (Evangeline Lilly) constantly runs from the law after killing her molester father. John Locke (Terry O'Quinn) suffers from a deceitful father who is responsible for almost every tragedy in his life, including his kidney loss and his paralysis. Likewise, the rugged individualist James "Sawyer" Ford (Josh Holloway) is greatly influenced by the familial drama he went through as a little boy when he witnessed his parents' murder/suicide. Jack, Kate, Locke, and Sawyer are just a few of the characters in the show that are portrayed as wounded and torn up by their relationship with their fathers. They repeatedly project aspects of their paternal drama onto their adult world, where the decisions they take and the choices they make are greatly influenced by their past father complexes.

Father issues lie at the core of *Lost*'s narrative. Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof, the co-producers and writers of the show, acknowledge the prominence of this recurring



theme while answering a fan's question at a recent Comic-Con convention: "I think father issues are very much a part of the show. Dramatically, that is something that we deal with extensively. And if you look at the characters on the show, a lot of the characters have 'daddy issues'. And that is sort of a thematic thread, and something that is very much a part of how we come up with stories and how we break stories" ("Official *Lost* Podcast")<sup>1</sup>. Because it is given much emphasis in the narrative of *Lost*, father issues have never fallen out of favor in discussions of the show. Various *Lost*-related media such as websites, blogs, books, and magazine articles have taken up the issue pointing to the significance of the 'deadbeat dads' in the show. Fans feeling compelled to find an explanation for the father issues speculate about the show on numerous websites and in online forums<sup>2</sup>. Books about the show allot chapters to the discussion of the parent-child relationships, laying out their own theorizing about its pervasiveness<sup>3</sup>. Magazine articles comment on *Lost*'s theme of failed fathers and warped children under titles such as "The 'Bad Daddy' Fixation on *Lost*," "Daddy Dearest—Are Father Issues at the Core of *Lost*?" and "Shepherd's Daddy Issues Multiply on *Lost*"<sup>4</sup>. However, since these sources are written primarily for a non-academic audience, they all present a superficial and somewhat sketchy understanding of the origins and effects of the failed fatherhood in the show. They call attention to the wider significance of the father problem within the context of the series, but fail to provide a comprehensive and scholarly reading, not going deeper into the social and cultural aspects of this problem.

In my thesis, I hope to remedy this situation by offering a critical investigation of the implications of the fatherhood crisis in *Lost*. On one level, I explore the ways in which the figure of the father and the patriarchal institution of fatherhood are represented

and reproduced in *Lost*. I investigate how the traditional understanding of father, as associated with values such as authority, discipline, regulation, stability and security, is reinstated in the representation of the failed fathers and troubled children in *Lost*. On a more psychological level, I examine how the failure of fatherhood affects the characters and their psychic structures in the show. I particularly focus on two characters, Jack Shepherd and John Locke, and by linking their identity crises, character flaws, and internal conflicts to their father complexes, I argue that the roots and dynamics of their character development are found in the nature of their conflicted relationships with their fathers. Both Jack and Locke constantly search for other paternal substitutes or ideals to fill the void left by their fathers. Their quests on the island consist largely of coming to terms with their problematic relationships with their fathers, resolving the painful circumstances of the past, and most importantly, finding a way of renewing their broken selves. The failed father in *Lost* becomes the locus of failed subjectivity and the quest for the father becomes the key to self-discovery.

### **Situating *Lost***

I do not view the failed fatherhood in *Lost* only within the textual confines of the show's narrative, exempt from its social and political context, but consider it as a contemporary issue that reveals itself in the representation of absent fathers and abandoned children in *Lost*. The show's treatment of fatherhood as a failing tradition can be related to a solid societal problem, namely 'fatherlessness' that heated much debate in both conservative and liberal circles since the beginning of 1990s. In *Lost Fathers*, a collection of scholarly essays that offer a range of perspectives on the issue of father absence, editor Cynthia Daniels states that in the last decade public attention has begun to

shift from mothers to fathers that emerge at the center of debates over sexuality, divorce, and family values (1). On the right-wing side of these debates, conservative pundits such as David Blankenhorn, Dan Quayle and William Bennett argue that the decline of paternal authority is the root cause of the chaotic and corrupt nature of contemporary society. They strongly support, as Todd McGowan notes, that “all our social problems result from the absence of the father who would lay down the law and utter his prohibition” (43). McGowan states that Dan Quayle exemplifies this position, “as he attacks liberals for their role in the father’s decline” (43), and is deeply embedded in his nostalgia for the re-creation of fatherhood as a vital role for men. By the end of 1990s, David Popenoe takes up the conservative case for the traditional father in his book *Life Without Father* (1999), wherein he argues that fatherlessness as a new trend should be reversed and replaced by a movement back to traditional nuclear families with a strong emphasis on marriage and fatherhood. He proposes that “we must reverse the tide that is pulling fathers apart from their families” in order to have a bright future (47).

Even though discussions of family values and fatherhood have usually been associated with conservatives, “today even cultural critics on the Left have taken notice of the father’s absence and its supposed nefarious effects” (McGowan 43). In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man* (1999), the feminist Susan Faludi documents the masculinity crisis that plagues American society at the end of the 1990s:

As the nation wobbled toward the millennium, its pulse-takers seemed to agree that a domestic apocalypse was under way: American manhood was under siege. Newspaper editors, TV pundits, fundamentalist preachers, marketers, legislators, no matter where they perched on the political spectrum, had a contribution to

make to the chronicles of the “masculinity crisis” ... Social scientists from right, left, and center pontificated on “endangered young black men” in the inner cities, Ritalin addicted white “bad boys” in the suburbs, “deadbeat dads” everywhere, and, less frequently, anguish of downsized male workers. (6)

Unlike conservatives who blame liberals for the collapse of paternal authority, Faludi believes that the sources of the masculinity crisis are found in the culture itself, that traditional masculine ideals and values such as authority, loyalty, and utility are no longer valued in contemporary society. Postwar men have lost “a useful role in public life, a way of earning a decent and reliable living, appreciation in the home, respectful treatment in the culture,” and exactly because of this low-grade position, Faludi believes, they fall into “a status oddly similar to that of women in midcentury” (40). For her, the new form of masculinity in the millennium has much in common with the cult of femininity that oppressed women before the rise of modern feminism in the 1960s.

Though Faludi grasps the socio-political context of the decline of the father in contemporary American society, both she and the conservative pundits fail in treating the father problem as more than a decrease in the number of effective men/fathers. They do not take into account that today’s fatherhood crisis primarily concerns the collapse of the father’s symbolic role and function rather than his psychical absence. As Paul Verhaeghe suggests, “the biggest problem today ... [is] the fact that the symbolic father function itself has become questionable. Its guaranteeing and answer-providing function is not very convincing anymore, to say the least” (137-8). Hence, “actual fathers ‘neglect’ their role as fathers not simply because they are irresponsible individuals but because the role itself has ceased to be socially viable” (McGowan 42). As a consequence, incapacitated

and bad fathers have become a pronounced aspect of public debate not because, to repeat McGowan's argument, their number has increased but because the superior position that is 'naturally' granted to the father has become questionable. For sure, children had conflicts with their fathers previously, or they had unloving or absent fathers, probably no less than today, but as Alan How explains, they sublimated or repressed their conflicts rather than acting them out (100). This was because the deeply rooted conviction of the father's superior/symbolic role required respect and submission that kept his children and wife in line. Hence, fathers have always been in crisis and fallen short, but their failures have usually been regarded as isolated incidents because the collective belief in their symbolic power in society continued to outbalance their shortcomings on an individual basis. Today, the fatherhood crisis does not necessarily result from an increase in the number of 'bad' fathers, but is symptomatic of the decline of the father's symbolic role and power in society.

Moreover, "since it is the function itself which is affected, the possibility of coming to terms with it is seriously hampered, because one is forced to stick with the real father and is without the symbolic father function" (Verhaeghe 138). Although Faludi does not go so far as to propose a return to the father, conservatives vehemently urge for the restoration of traditional fatherhood, a wish that proves futile since, as Verhaeghe states above, without the symbolic father function, real fathers cannot embody the ideals associated (in many people's mind) with the traditional father such as authority, dominance, and superiority. John Gillis explains this clearly:

The best that Western societies have hoped for is the revival and revitalization of fatherhood, a project that, for all its religious, social, scientific, psychological,

and, most recently, men's movement incarnations, has consistently failed to achieve its goals, largely because it has treated fatherhood as a problem to be solved by the conscientious efforts of fathers themselves. In reducing the problem of fatherhood to the individual level, the revitalizationist approach has ignored the degree to which the problem of fatherhood is built into the very political, economic, and cultural constitution of the modern world. (180-1)

As Gillis points out, it is important to understand the decline of the paternal function as an outcome of the postmodern condition (with its distinct social, economic, and political configurations), a condition that, by raising doubts about previous collective assumptions and calling into question established norms and foundations, necessitates the fall of the father on a large scale. *Lost*'s overall representation of the father problem similarly hints that the show understands today's decline of the father as a socially-conditioned situation. As apparent in its depictions of the father figure as predominantly fallible, impotent, and unreliable, the series positions traditional fatherhood as a withering or missing tradition. It demonstrates the futility and impossibility of attaining the virtues and traditional expectations of fatherhood (such as being a role model and the main economic provider as the head of the house) through its portrayals of family breakdown and dysfunctional relationships. However, even though *Lost* offers, what one might call, a 'realist' depiction of fatherhood as a failed tradition, I argue that it still displays a hidden and innate desire for the (lost) father and the old ideals he has come to represent such as authority, stability, and security; this is apparent in the castaways' long-continued quest for their lost fathers or other paternal substitutes in order to fill the place left by their fathers (not always in the form of a physical father, but also in search of ideals and traditions associated with

the figure of the father). In this way, I contend that *Lost* adopts a conservative attitude by creating nostalgia/yearning for the father. Although it does not openly proclaim a return to traditional fatherhood, such as the conservative pundits mentioned earlier, *Lost* re-articulates a psychoanalytic myth about the essential role of the father in its narrative, especially in its characterization.

Consequently, in my thesis, I explore how *Lost* seeks to reinstate the myth/symbol of the father while destabilizing and challenging the traditional depictions of fatherhood. However, before moving on to my discussion of the show's representation of fatherhood, I want to offer a brief investigation of television fathers through the decades, glimpsing at the range they have covered over television's short but sophisticated history. Beginning in the 1950s, I track the transitions occurring in the portrayal of men as fathers on television from the conventional and stereotypical 'white-collar' fathers of early television to the diversified and multi-faceted fathers of the new millennium. I believe that offering such a basis is important in providing a historically grounded perspective on the father problem in *Lost*, and in recognizing, first and foremost, that the overturning of traditional authoritarian fathers in *Lost* did not come out of blue, but is a part of the gradual transformation televised fathers have been going through since the introduction of television.

Secondly, providing such a historical background reveals the intimate relationship between the gender politics of television and the wider socio-political context: therefore today's crisis in fatherhood as represented in *Lost* is understood as a product of the political, economic, and cultural constitution of contemporary society. Writing on the representation of masculinity on television, Kenneth MacKinnon states that the gender

regime of television is not a monolith, but “shifts with the social ... since television’s output is part of the social and has effects on it as well as being affected by it” (80). By the same token, Horace Newcomb suggests that television “does not exist in a realm of its own, cut off from the influence of its citizens” and the television scholar’s aim is to discover “the ways in which the varied worlds interact” (512). Both scholars point out what I believe is crucial to the study of television texts: the relationship of television representations to their historical world. I consider the representations of failed fatherhood in *Lost* as embedded in “the ongoing American social experience and cultural history” (Newcomb 508). These representations are a part of the cultural transformation that brought about the gradual erosion of masculinity and the fatherhood crisis.

### **Early Television Fathers:**

#### **The 1950s and 1960s**

Much like the present day debate over the decline of paternal authority in American society, early representations of fathers on television dealt with conflicting ideas about the role of the father as a way of “working through” changing ideas about family in the 1950s (Ellis 55). As Tasha Oren notes, the positioning of the mother at the center of the comedy and the father as an incompetent, subordinate figure was a TV tradition in early sitcoms (84). Beginning with *The Burns and Allen Show* (1950-1958), *I Love Lucy* (1951-1957), and *I Married Joan* (1952-1955) in the early 1950s and continuing with *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* (1952-1966) in the 1960s, early domestic comedies typically depicted the father, as one contemporary critic says, as “a bumbling, well-meaning idiot who is nothing but putty in the hands of his wife and family” (qtd. in Oren 84). Oren notes that the media fretted about these depictions at the



time, highlighting their concern that they adversely affected male authority and presented a poor example to viewers. For example, a 1954 reviewer writes: “As every dial-turner knows, television inundates the American home daily with a peculiar message. The message says that the American father is a weak-willed, predicament-inclined clown whose business and social life would go to pot in an instant if he were not saved from his doltishness by a beautiful and intelligent wife and his beautiful and intelligent children” (qtd. in Oren 84).

Lynn Spigel writes that the fictional representations of the family in sitcoms of the early 1950s had “some degree of diversity” (through portrayals of ethnic families such as the Norwegian family of *Mama* and the Jewish family of *The Goldbergs*), but “by 1960 all the ethnic comedies and dramas disappeared and the suburban domestic comedy rose to prominence” (“Family on Television”). As she notes, “of the seventeen different family sitcoms that aired on network prime time between 1957 and 1960, fourteen were set in suburbs ... [B]y September 1960, they [the ethnic variations] were all off the network” (*Welcome* 118). With this shift in the format of the sitcom, fatherhood representations on television underwent a radical transformation. Gone were the comedic representations of incompetent fathers lambasted by critics, and replaced by authoritative, stern images of the father. As Oren notes, the new sitcom format “strained to rehabilitate the household, and its male head, with much-needed respect” (87). In shows such as *Father Knows Best* (1954-1960), *Leave it to Beaver* (1957-1963), and *The Danny Thomas Show*, also known as *Make Room for Daddy* (1953-1964), the father was typically depicted as all-knowing, wise, and at the center of the household. As Mary Beth Haralovich notes, *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* “shifted the source of

comedy to the ensemble of the nuclear family as it realigned the roles within the family” (73). Unlike early urban sitcoms such as *The Life of Riley* (1949-1958) and *The Honeymooners* (1955-1956), in which fathers were the source of amusement with their clumsy, inept, and bumbling manners, the suburban sitcoms of the 1960s portrayed fathers as exclusively wise, stern, and sober. While in shows such as *Leave it to Beaver* children were the subject of humour, the father’s status never became a “laughing matter” (Miller). He was the totem of the family, serving as its sole guardian and moral compass. His superior status at home was acknowledged by both his wife and children as they were economically dependent on him. As Miller argues, in these suburban comedies, the father’s authority around the house was “the whole point of the spectacle,” which is also reflected in their daunting titles: “*Make Room for Daddy* and *Father Knows Best* were pure and simple threats.”

During the 1960s, while the representation of the suburban nuclear family with wise, discerning, and authoritative fathers pervaded, prime-time television also featured alternative family arrangements exemplified by single-headed and fantastic families. Shows such as *Bachelor Father* (1957-1962), *The Andy Griffith Show* (1960-1968), *My Three Sons* (1960-1972), and *Family Affair* (1966-1971) presented families led by a single father. In most of these shows, fathers were portrayed as less strict and sober; they were more concerned with and compassionate about their children whom they raised single-handedly. In *Bachelor Father* and *My Three Sons*, the family unit consisted not of a father and mother but two men: one was the patriarch (the father) while the other (usually a servant) was the caregiver. By the late 1960s, a new trend of fantastic family shows started to make the scene. In shows such as *Bewitched* (1964-1972) and *I Dream*

of *Jeannie* (1965-1970), once solemn and prudent fathers were depicted as goofy men who were laughed at for being made foolish by their wives' supernatural powers. As Spigel suggests, these fantastic comedies "can be seen as the 1960s answer to the ethnic and working class family programs of the early decade. Although Italian immigrants, Jewish mothers, and working-class bus drivers might have disappeared from the screen, they returned in a new incarnation as genies, witches, and robots" (*Welcome* 123). The ethnic portrayals of the early 1950s were replaced by powerful female characters, which hinted at the beginnings of the feminist movement, and the male struggle to negotiate changing gender roles in society.

However, in spite of these alternative families, the white nuclear family of the suburbs predominated as the ideal in the 1960s. As Muriel Cantor writes, the family roles and values displayed in these fictional households became "synonymous with our ideas about family during that period" (279). Donna Stone and June Cleaver were identified with the 1960s American housewife while Jim Anderson's "wise, concerning, understanding father" became "the symbol of the ideal American father" (280). The 1960s suburban sitcoms defined a standard and traditional idea of family, determining how a mother ought to behave by portraying the image of a happy contented wife, who does the chores, makes the meal, and tends after the children in an always loving manner. In a similar way, fathers were expected to go to work, be the main (economic) provider at home, and never relinquish masculine dignity, thus always portraying a stern and sober father image. In this way, these suburban sitcoms "taught" about appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, setting the norms about "the way families should be." As Stephanie Coontz contends, "our most powerful visions of traditional families derive

from images ... of 1950s television sit-coms” (22)<sup>5</sup>. As Coontz makes clear in the ironic title of her book, *The Way We Never Were*, actual families in this time period never lived up to the nostalgic notions defined by televised families. Their real-time experiences and complex domestic lives got “buried under the weight of an idealized image” (1).

The fictional suburban households of the 1960s appeared more ‘real’ because the realist mode of representation heavily employed by networks was able to carry a socially convincing sense of the real. As John Fiske writes in his seminal book *Television Culture* (1987), realism as a mode of representation creates the illusion that what we see in television is a portion of reality, simply mirroring the outside reality back to us (21). However, television cannot present the real without first recasting it according to technical codes (camera, lighting, editing), economic imperatives and ideological parameters, therefore modifying it and fictionalizing it to a great extent. As Fiske suggests, television “produces ‘reality’ rather than reflects it” (21). It legitimizes and naturalizes the dominant ideology by making it appear ‘realistic,’ a product of reality or nature, and therefore masks its cultural constructedness and ideological intent. In most of the suburban sitcoms of the 1960s, masculinity as the dominant patriarchal ideology was continually reconstituted through traditional representations of manhood and fatherhood. These representations presented some ‘preferred’ meanings and values about masculinity as universal or the norm, helping to render invisible the privileged position of (white) men in American society by making it seem ‘natural’ and ‘immanent’ while at the same time occasionally undermining it through portrayals of bumbling, goofy men. Television is hegemonic in the sense that it negotiates between competing social values and issues,

but it does not present all meanings equally. As Jeremy Butler notes, television tends to stress those meanings that support, or reinforce “the dominant cultural order” (11).

The representations of masculinity and femininity in the suburban sitcoms of the 1960s generally worked to buttress the social and economic order. By hiding their constructed nature, a majority of these shows reproduced myths that created unrealistic expectations about what families could do while projecting selected and mediated meanings as the norm. Fiske emphasizes this point by stating that “realism shares many of the characteristics that Barthes ascribes to myth and these all stem from its being a discourse that hides its discursive nature and presents itself as natural rather than cultural, that is an unmediated product of, or reflection of, an innocent reality” (41). Television in general is a myth-producing medium, never more so than in its gender representations. On the majority of 1960s suburban sitcoms, both femininity and masculinity are presented in relation to whiteness, excluding people from other ethnicities and racial backgrounds. In particular, white men are given a “privileged position” writes Robert Hanke, from which they “are able to articulate their interests to the exclusion of the interests of women, men and women of color, and children” (“Redesigning Men” 186). By preferring certain meanings and excluding others, television’s early representation of masculinity was designed to work mythically: it presented a selected and prejudiced set of behaviors as the truth or essence of masculinity.

Fiske’s account of the process of meaning making in television can be adapted to the early TV texts, but when it comes to contemporary ones, his theorizing might seem outdated, especially in comparison to the rapid transformations television and its gender regime have gone through in the last few decades. However, I think his idea that

television reproduces myths by recasting and promoting the dominant ideology is still central to understanding TV texts. In my discussion of *Lost*, I will present a new way of applying his theory to a contemporary TV text produced in the post-network era in order to explore the continuing relevance of his work. In my analysis of *Lost*, it is apparent that even though the gender representations have drastically changed from the early representations, television still creates or relies on myths about family. Despite *Lost*'s diversified portrayals of race, age, gender, nationality, and physical appearance, it still maintains an ideological position in its portrayal of the father. In my thesis, I will explore how the show maintains the psychoanalytic myth that views parental relations, especially the figure of the father, as essential to the formation of the self.

### **Television Fathers in Flux:**

#### **From the 1970s to the Present**

Beginning in the early 1970s, the portrayal of fathers on television gradually transformed, giving way to more diverse, less conventional and stereotypical representations. Spigel writes that "the 1970s was a time of significant change as the portrayal of family life became more diverse, although never completely representative of all American lifestyles" ("Family on Television"). The introduction of African-American families was carried through in shows such as *Good Times* (1974-1979), *The Jeffersons* (1975-1985), and *Sanford and Son* (1972-1977), the last of which featured a widower who had to raise his son alone, thus following the same trend as the late 1960s single parent families with an African-American cast. Moreover, shows featuring women pursuing a profession and having a career, such as *The Mary Tyler Show* (1970-1977),

and single mothers, as in *Julia* (1968-1971), presented alternative and non-traditional patterns of family arrangement.

The transformations that the representation of family life and fatherhood went through on television in this period were largely the result of social and political developments arising from various 1960s and 70s social movements. As Fiske suggests, “social change does occur, ideological values do shift, and television is a part of this movement” (45). The social change that altered the traditional view of masculinity in the post-war America surely had an impact upon the normative manhood and fatherhood depicted on television. Primarily, the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s presented the greatest challenge to the notions of hegemonic masculinity by putting stress on the equality of women and men. Within the women’s liberation movement, women demanded equal rights with men – “that men cease abusing, raping, and battering women, that men begin to share in the daily chores around the household, and that they accept that women were working right alongside them” (Kimmel 273). This renewed stress on equality had, as Anton Obholzer notes, “the result that, in the second half of the twentieth century, there was an increasing loss of confidence in the value of the received sense of manhood and fatherhood” (xv).

During the 1960s, the ideal of masculinity was further challenged by the civil rights and gay liberation movements. Within the civil rights movement, black people protested for the abolishment of the private and public acts of racial discrimination from slavery onwards, and demanded the integration of black people into full citizenship. As Michael Kimmel puts it, they “reclaimed a manhood stolen from black men by white slavers and denied by two centuries of racist politics” (271). Thence, the civil rights

movement challenged racism in America and had an impact in shaping how dominant white masculinity was perceived by equating the demand for equal rights with a demand for full recognition of black men as men. It was not only black people, who challenged the normative stereotype, but also homosexuals, who were moving from the margins of society to the mainstream during the 1970s. Gay men were “certainly making it plain that the traditional equation of gay man as failed man was no longer tenable. Gay liberation signaled that gay men, too, could stake their claim for manhood” (Kimmel 279-80).

While these social and political movements in the late 1960s gradually eroded dominant masculinity in American society, the aftermath of the Vietnam War accelerated the loss of confidence in traditional notions of militarism and manhood. The nation’s defeat in Vietnam was a frustration and failure of policy (MacKinnon 85). It shook apart the traditional concepts of masculinity embodied until then in the ideal of the citizen soldier. As Kimmel states, “one of the most reliable refuges for beleaguered masculinity, the soldier/protector, fell into such disrepute as the news about Vietnam filtered home (263). Eventually, traditional masculinity, which based its dominance on the exclusion and suppression of women, people of colour, homosexuals, and the glorification of the ideals embodied in the military, lost its secure ground.

The erosion of masculinity and fatherhood manifested itself in the popular media representations of men with a new focus on their sensitive and soft side. Kimmel talks about this new genre visible throughout the 1980s in movies such as *Kramer vs Kramer* (1979), *Three Men and a Baby* (1987), *Bye Bye Love* (1987), and lastly *Mrs. Doubtfire* (1993), which, as a rule, portrayed loving and sensitive family men compensating for an absent mother, while at the same time, maintaining their position as the head of the



household (46). On television, programs such as *Thirtysomething* (1987-1991) focused on young male professionals whose sensitivity and devotion to family were the whole point of the spectacle. Robert Hanke argues that this new portrayal of fathers as sensitive, caring, and domestic was a way to reinforce the status quo and therefore a negotiated version of hegemonic masculinity (“Hegemonic Masculinity” 231). *The Cosby Show* (1984-1992), which ran throughout most of the 80s, also presented a negotiated portrayal of the traditional father: Bill Cosby was the patriarch as a funny and playful father, who disciplined his children not in the stern and authoritative style of early television parenting, but in a playful yet still effective manner.

In the 1980s, male sensitivity portrayed in shows like *Thirtysomething* coexisted with representations of hyper-masculinity on television. MacKinnon explains that the television season of the 1985-86 went through “a time of rebirth of the macho man as a backlash against the more sensitive male of then recent seasons” (81). The revival of the macho male on television coincided with the period of Ronald Reagan’s call for the restoration of traditional values in American society. Reagan’s nostalgia for a return to traditions and, in particular, the values of dominant masculinity prospered, as MacKinnon writes, due to the “American loss of confidence in traditional notions of militarism and patriotism after the nation’s defeat in Vietnam” (85). The revival of the macho male in the 1980s was embodied in such male action figures as Sylvester Stallone, Jean-Claude Van Damme, and Arnold Schwarzenegger. With their bulging muscles, massive bodies, and tough looks, these figures attempted to restore a nostalgic idea of masculine authority to a public trying to overcome the psychological effects of the defeat in Vietnam. The television series *The A-Team* (1983-1987) portrayed the same sense of aggressive

masculinity, encapsulating the nostalgic desire for the restoration of male authority.

After this period of nostalgia, portrayals of the breakdown of the family ideal and masculine ideology re-appeared on television in the 1990s and the new millennium. As Spigel writes, among family-oriented shows and sitcoms, parodying “the happy shiny people of old TV” was a general trend (“Family on Television”). Programs such as *Married with Children* (1987-1997) and *Roseanne* (1988-1997) were highly popular parodies of traditional family life that focused on class and the problems of dysfunctional families. In these shows, fathers as the head of the household did not have rewarding careers; Al Bundy and Dan Connor would constantly be mocked and disrespected by their families. With *The Simpsons* (1989 – present), parodying middle-class family ideals reached its peak; *The Simpsons* became the longest running dysfunctional family on television. In the new millennium, *Family Guy* (1999 – present) premiered as a similar animated television series about a dysfunctional family. More contemporary portrayal of fathers are thus purged from the father’s traditional/stereotypical image, giving way to more multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, and realistic/humane (not ‘super-dads’ with answers to anything) representations.

As Chris Barker notes, contemporary television challenges “the domination of realist mode of representation” (164) by assuming a postmodern mode of representation which is self-reflexive. While in the 1960s, realism typically hides the constructed nature of representations by making them seem realistic and natural, postmodernism exposes representations as ideologically grounded. Linda Hutcheon provides a good explanation of postmodern representation in *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989). She writes that postmodernism is a site of “de-naturalizing” or “de-doxifying” critique, unmasking the

political aspect of cultural representations (3). In contemporary postmodern television, representations manifest their awareness of ideological structures and values by assuming a self-reflexive/self-aware position. Today, the artificial nature of the early rigid and prudent fathers and the masculinity they embodied are largely regarded as the personification of an outmoded ideology. The father figure has considerably lost its once dominant authority on television. However, as I will argue in the following section, television, in particular *Lost*, still works ideologically to emphasize the centrality of the father in the lives of the survivors.

### ***Lost* and the Representation of Fatherhood**

*Lost* is often acclaimed for its postmodern innovations, narrative experimentation, and character complexity. At the heart of the series is a complex and cryptic storyline that weaves its way through plot twists, shifting perspectives, unresolved questions, time-space confusion, and genre mixing, all of which typify postmodern television. The characters in *Lost* are also unstable, fragmented, multiple, and subject to dramatic transformations. Their identities are in constant flux, moving around on the scale of good and evil. It is nearly impossible for viewers of *Lost* to pin down any of the characters as they can always do something unanticipated or act unexpectedly. These are just a few ways *Lost* challenges and undermines conventional modes of representation and makes viewers suspicious of their forged sense of reality.

*Lost* demonstrates the same 'unconventional' attitude in its portrayal of family dysfunction and fatherhood crisis. With a postmodern self-awareness, *Lost* illustrates the impossibility of retaining traditional notions of family with fixed subject positions and gendered norms. It challenges the ideology of the stable family unit and pictures family

in various fractured forms: blended families, divorced families, and single parent families. It deals with a variety of family issues: immaculate conception, custody rights, alcoholism, and molestation. It presents diversified portrayals of the father: vanished father, absent father, molester father, unloving father, murderer father, oppressive father, father as a confidence man and as a deceiver. The show constructs an image of family, particularly fatherhood, that departs from its traditional role and functions by deemphasizing the signs of dominance and authority. This way, *Lost* exposes the ideologies within the conventions and presuppositions of family and gender by pointing to their artificiality and constructedness.

However, that *Lost* seems to undermine and challenge ideology through its innovative representation of family and gender does not mean the show is free of ideology. Innovations and reformations in televisual representations are always produced within the value system of their historical time. As I demonstrated in my historical analysis, changes in the father's portrayal in contemporary television texts and in *Lost* grapple with changes in American society. Robert Hanke writes, "television works hegemonically, not only by imposing dominant (masculinist) ideology, but also by 'articulating the relations between series of ideologies (subordinate as well as dominant), overlapping them on to one another, so as to bring about certain movements and reformations of subjectivity'" ("Redesigning Men" 195-6). That television works ideologically not only means that it promotes the dominant ideology, but it can negotiate with other alternative ideologies and can shift its gender regime to create improvements and innovations. The representation of fathers in *Lost* is a part of the changing (declining) status of the traditional father and authority in American society – these representations

could not be produced in a period when father portrayals stereotypically followed a common pattern as in the 1960s. Hence, *Lost*'s unconventional and nonconformist depictions of family and gender should not be readily labeled as progressive or radical. As Hanke notes, "without falling prey to the 'progressive fallacy'" (197), their ideological practices should be taken into account by exploring how they reproduce power relations through their 'unconventional' representations, a task I take on in this thesis.

Although *Lost* destabilizes the dominant myths related to family as a stable and nuclear unit with fixed gender roles, I argue that it remains ideologically committed to the father's mythic importance in the lives of the children. In spite of its unconventional stances in terms of narrative, description of gender, nationality, and race, *Lost* still conforms to the psychoanalytic myth about the centrality of the father. The series portrays the father figure (itself a cultural construct, a product of society) as an indispensable need and a fundamental part of identity. It presents the ideologically mediated reality of the father's vital role in his son's biological development and therefore continues the psychoanalytic tradition (especially Freudian) that transforms, as Izzard suggests, certain patriarchal ideals and values (including the underlying image of the father in the Western world) "into biological, instinctual features of the psyche" (3). By reading characters such as Jack Shepherd and John Locke according to Freud's essentialist and phallogentric conception of development/subjectivity, I contend that the show perpetuates the psychoanalytic myth of the father as the essence of one's identity.

In this way, *Lost* reveals the inherent contradiction of postmodern representation: it reveals the subversion of fatherhood as a tradition, but also the desire to reclaim that

tradition. It both challenges and ironically employs the traditional and essentialist ideas about fatherhood and subjectivity. Writing on the paradox of postmodern critique, Hutcheon notes that postmodernism “is an even-handed process because postmodernism ultimately manages to install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert conventions and presuppositions it seeks to challenge” (2). While criticizing and uncovering ideologies, postmodernism also complies with power and the values it seeks to comment upon. As a postmodern text, *Lost* reflects this contradiction of postmodern representation. It destabilizes the ideology of the stable family unit, but most of the characters in the show struggle both on and off the island to find stability through family relations (either by forming families on their own or by making their peace with their existent families). It also undermines liberal humanist notions of autonomous and rational subjects through its representation of fragmented, multi-dimensional, and unstable subjects, but the characters in the show, as I will argue, are in a constant search for wholeness, autonomy, and unity in order to renew their fractured selfhood. Their search for independence is embodied in their search for a paternal figure in order to fill the void in the place of their father and feel whole again. In conclusion, through my thesis, I intend to call attention to a less-discussed/forgotten aspect of *Lost*: its conventional/ideological position in terms of its representation of the father according to Freud’s orthodox conceptions, and in this way, to show how *Lost* is not simply unconventional or revolutionary, but rather a mixture of dominant and alternative discourses, as it seeks to both denounce the father and herald his centrality.

## Methodology

In order to explore and unearth the mythic level of meaning in the father-son relationships in the show, I will first examine the psychic and symbolic significance of the father that is built into the heart of orthodox psychoanalytic theory and enshrined in Freud's foundational concept of the Oedipus complex. In my following literature review, I will offer an overview of Freud's formulation and Lacan's reformulation of the Oedipus complex as the nucleus of identity that bestows primary importance upon the father "by identifying a child's confrontation with paternal authority as the most critical stage in psychosexual development" (Freeman 119). After uncovering the Oedipus complex/traditional father as a modern myth, I will consider the contemporary decline of paternal authority as an outcome of the growing postmodern suspension of phallogentric assumptions. I will suggest, however, that despite its being less transcendent in today's society, the Oedipus complex as a mythic construct still shapes our understanding of gender relationships, sexuality, and selfhood. *Lost* exemplifies the continuing importance of this psychoanalytic myth by constructing its televised personae according to its essentialist and universal conceptions about the fundamental role of the father.

After providing a psychoanalytic context for the discussion of the show in my literature review, I will move onto the analysis of the paternal issues in *Lost*. In the next two chapters, I will explore the father complexes of two fundamental characters in the show: Jack Shepherd and John Locke<sup>6</sup>. By tracing their personality flaws and disorders back to their childhood experiences, particularly their Oedipal memories, I will reveal the mythic importance of the father in their lives. Thus, their state of being lost on the island can be perceived as a manifestation of the inner loss resulting from the absence of

paternal authority, while their motivations, objectives, and actions can be viewed as strategies developed to cope with this absence. For example, Jack's inflated obsession with "fixing things" and Locke's blind faith in the island (resulting from his need for paternal security and guidance) relate to their father problems and thus can be thought of as unique responses they develop to overcome these problems. Charles Brenner suggests that "for a literary work to have a strong, or, even more, a lasting appeal, its plot must arouse and gratify some important aspect of the unconscious Oedipal wishes of the members of its audience" (256). Characters in literary works – and we can expand this to include texts found in mass media such as television and thus *Lost* – represent disguised versions of Oedipal parents and their children as a way of appealing to the audience by providing a sense of the familiar. By alluding to the father's mythic importance in Jack and Locke's narrative, *Lost* makes these characters much more accessible and universal among the audience who can thus identify with them more easily.

Before moving onto a discussion of the role of the myths/ideologies in the construction of television characters, I want to explain the rationale behind my selection of Jack and Locke as the two main characters for analysis, which means that I will exclude other likewise personally dynamic, multifold, and multifarious characters who have complex father problems such as, among others, Benjamin Linus, James "Sawyer" Ford, Jin and Sun Kwon. First, since it is a thesis project and thus has restricted space for analysis (unlike a book length discussion of the series), I cannot thoroughly investigate every character with father issues in the show, so I have to narrow down my analysis to only a few selected characters. Out of a wide spectrum of characters, I chose Jack and Locke because, first and foremost, they are the central characters of the show. Specific



characters have waxed and waned in their narrative importance, but Jack and Locke have stayed pivotal to the show's central narrative. Moreover, since they are the most prominent characters, we are given more access to their consciousness through flashbacks and flash-forwards (and thus to their father issues) than other regular characters such as Boone, Shannon, Michael, or Claire who, during the course of the show, remain relatively rudimentary. Secondly, Jack and Locke are not only important in terms of the narrative, but also key to understanding the show's thematic richness. *Lost*'s survey of the epistemological conflict between reason and faith, randomness and fate, and over-determined causality and blind chance is embodied in the figures of Jack and Locke and is often manifested through their conflicted relationship as a man of science and man of faith.

In my analysis of Jack and Locke's father-centric narratives, I will conduct a discursive (also called structuralist or mythic) reading. In *Television Culture*, Fiske writes that "in this approach character is seen as a textual device, constructed, like other textual devices, from discourse" (153). While realist reading "requires us to give prime attention to such factors as the psychological realism of its characters and their individuality, ... and their believability according to the 'natural' laws of cause and effect" (129), discursive reading requires us to "focus on the conventions by which this sense of the real is established" (130). In contrast to realist reading that judges a television character based on his or her believability, discursive reading sees character as a construct, an extension of the social and political world. Character traits are not derived from the nature of the character, but are representations of "social positions and values embodied in them" (158). This kind of reading strategy fits with and reinforces my discussion of *Lost*

because it encourages to reveal the discursive nature of television representations and investigate the ‘deeper’ meaning of the text. By adopting this reading strategy, I will explore and unearth the collective assumptions and myths that underlie the show’s representation of family, fatherhood, and subjectivity in order to support my argument that *Lost* remains ideologically committed to the Oedipal model of development in its characterization of the survivors. In particular, Jack and Locke’s character constructions are governed by their unresolved Oedipal conflicts with their fathers, revealing the discursive nature of the Oedipus complex embedded in their characterization.

While conducting a discursive reading of the characters in the show, I will take into account *Lost*’s unique narrative structure and innovative storytelling devices. As Jason Mittell notes in *Television and American Culture*, apart from its thematic richness, international cast, and genre mixture, “what the show has become known for is its unconventional narrative content and structure” (263). Even though it starts out as a fairly conventional island narrative – a plane crashes on a deserted island and its passengers try to survive in this unknown and hostile environment – *Lost* becomes increasingly strange and hard to classify because it narrates the island story in a different and innovative way, which is, in part, what makes the show so popular. As a general rule, each episode focuses on a particular character and recounts the island story from his or her perspective. In addition to the island narrative (which is recounted chronologically), each episode also presents an off-island narrative (which is told out of order) of that particular character. Until season three, the off-island narrative recounts the pre-island lives of the characters through flashbacks, “interweaving past events prior to the doomed flight with the challenges of life on the island, to create parallel narrative threads that resonate in often

surprising ways” (Mittell, *Television and American Culture* 265). In season four, the flashbacks are usurped by flash-forwards providing glimpses from the lives of some of the eight characters who escape the island. In season five, as Joanne Morreale states, “the circularity of time becomes crucial, as several characters travel back in time to 1977” (181). In season six, flash-sideways replaces flashbacks and flash-forwards as a secondary storyline, narrating the castaways’ stories in a parallel world. Consequently, throughout the series, *Lost*’s nonlinear narrative movement comes through flashbacks that provide revelatory insights about the characters (that are frequently thematized through problematizations of parentage), flash-forwards that narrate the characters’ disorientation in the outside world after their rescue, and “in the final season, flash-sideways to a parallel world that ultimately holds the key to the series’ resolution” (Morreale 181).

This complex and overlapping episodic structure is reinforced by the show’s compelling formal strategies such as, among others, suspense, dislocation, fragmentation, and plot twist. The show uses surprise and suspense frequently, revealing major story developments in unexpected ways and keeping the viewers in constant anticipation of what is going to happen next. The extensive use of suspense is one of the distinctive aspects of the show, since it is notorious for raising new questions even before answering the previous ones, which, therefore, creates an ever-expanding narrative that eschews closure. Suspense, creating dislocation and fragmentation, is another signature of the show. Formal techniques such as complex rearrangement of time, jumping in narrative focus, and alternating perspectives destabilize the linearity of narrative while fragmenting and demarcating time and therefore dislocating the viewer from the familiar. Plot twist is

another frequently employed strategy. Through plot twist, as Mittell explains “the show cleverly exploits the camera’s ability to present details of the diegetic world in a selective way” (“Film and Television Narrative” 169).

But, what is the relationship of *Lost*’s complex narrative structure and style to my discursive reading of the characters? While the show’s formal practices can be studied on their own merits (which is generally what happens since the narrative form of the show has been placed at the forefront of academic studies), I believe that they should be studied in relation to the show’s content because form and content are always in unity. In *Lost*, formal elements grow out of a need to describe and delineate the character. If the characters, for example, were one-dimensional and static (as they were in many of the early sitcoms and dramatic series), the narrative would suitably be linear with a straightforward plot structure and a continuous temporality. However, if the characters, as in *Lost*, are multifaceted and unstable, the narrative format must keep up with that, fragmenting time to reflect the fragmentation of character, or creating dislocation in viewers to allow them to share the characters’ sense of dislocation. In *Television and American Culture*, Mittell gives an example from the opening of *Lost*’s pilot to “illustrate how formal choices convey meanings and emotional responses to viewers” (259). He talks about the extreme close-up of Jack’s eye accompanied by a startling sound effect and exaggerated iris dilation that provoke mystery and disorientation in viewers. He points to disorienting jump cuts and violations of the 180 degree rule “heightening the sense of confusion and the intensity of action” and therefore “grounding viewers in Jack’s experiences to establish him as the protagonist” (261). Highlighting the unity of form and content throughout my reading of Jack and Locke, I will occasionally draw

attention to *Lost*'s complex narrative practices, be it flash-forwards or plot twists, as useful tools that convey and heighten certain feelings and emotions of the characters.

While developing a complex, intricately plotted narrative, programs like *Lost* also encourage the formation of virtual fan-based communities. The general move towards complex storytelling in American television has brought with it the emergence of participatory online fan communities, "offering theories and compiling evidence in a collaborative effort to parse the programs" (Mittell, "Film and Television Narrative" 170). Since complex narratives require narrative comprehension that necessitates a great deal of cognitive engagement (unlike traditional narratives where the basic mechanisms of following a story is usually automatic), the viewing experience does not often terminate when the program ends, but continues in its "parallel universe on the Internet" (Kogen 53). Viewers participate in online fan communities to crack, in a collaborative effort, the codes and hidden messages of the programs. By establishing a constantly demanding, complex story world, *Lost* also invites its viewers actively to decode the show's narrative enigmas on the Internet together with their fellow fans. It encourages them to form "a second community in addition to the survivors" in their effort to work together to create meaning out of disparate information (Kogen 53). Hence, the show's complex narrative style attempts to re-create the experiences of the survivors on the island beyond the narrative by encouraging viewers to experience the same sense of disorientation and confusion while trying to piece together fragments to construct a coherent understanding of time and story. Marc Dolan also points this out when he writes, "as *Lost*'s story invites its characters to join in a community of collective action, the series invites us to join as viewers in a community of collective meaning" (155). In

this way, as the boundary between character and viewer dissolves, viewers can take part in the narrative and become a part of the collective effort to solve the mysteries and enigmas of the island. Throughout my analysis, I will reflect on this aspect of the show: how *Lost*'s unique narrative style and content help to weave an intimate and complex relationship between characters and viewers, whereby they feel the same sense of loss and confusion.

Lastly, with a return to the father, I explore the paternal implications and origins of the viewers' shared affinity for creating meaning out of fragments. As evident in a large number of blogs and forums devoted to decoding the show's mysteries, for some *Lost* viewers, viewership requires extra work and commitment whereby they turn fragments into unities, put erratic events into chronological order, and make dispersed sense of time and place comprehensive. For example, in some websites, there are individual as well as collective endeavors to re-arrange the show's fourth and fifth seasons (when the relatively chronological order of the first three seasons gave way to shifting, confusing time flashes) into a logical viewing order. There are even projects undertaken to present the show in its entirety in chronological order, as the blog author Mike Maloney states, "integrating the different seasons into one master timeline." As these efforts of the devoted fans show, there is a reliance on conventional methods in the interpretation of the show: bringing order into disparate information, making a whole out of fragments, etc. The fans' search for unity, order, and continuity, which resembles *Lost* survivors' search for meaning and purpose on the island, implies a search for the father who functions as an anchor or a fixed reference point. Beth Erickson notes that the need for the father comes to expression as a search for meaning because the father, as a

psychoanalytic construct, represents the ideas of unity, stability, order, and meaning (171). In Lacanian terminology, language is the Law of the Father; the symbolic order that stabilizes meaning and identity is dominated by the Father as the transcendental/master signifier. Hence, *Lost* unites viewers and castaways in their collective effort to search for the lost father (lost sense of stabilized, unified meaning). At this point, my research on the father also becomes a search for the father: my tendency to interpret the narrative/characters in a linear fashion finds its base in a secret nostalgia for stability, order, and thus the father.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> At Comic-Con in 2006 – a big convention hosting *Lost* writers, producers, and cast to provide them with a space to interact with the fans of the show – a fan asked the writers of the show “if there’s anything that goes along with the rich powerful fathers, like Sun’s dad, Jack’s dad, Locke’s dad, Libby’s husband...” (“Official *Lost* Podcast”).

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, *Lostpedia* (lostpedia.wikia.com), *The Fuselage* (www.thefuselage.com), *Dark Ufo* (darkufo.blogspot.com), and *The Lost Forum* (www.lostforum.gen.tr).

<sup>3</sup> See, for example, Marc Oromaner, *The Myth of Lost: Solving the Mysteries and Understanding the Wisdom* (New York: iUniverse, 2008) and J. Wood, *Living Lost: Why We’re All Stuck on the Island* (New Orleans: Garrett County Press, 2007).

<sup>4</sup> Jeff Jensen, “The ‘Bad Daddy’ Fixation on *Lost*.” 16 May 2007. *Entertainment Weekly*. 14 January 2011 <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,20038982,00.html>>. Jon Lachonis, “Daddy Dearest – Are Father Issues at the Core of *Lost*?” 18 March 2007. *BuddyTV*. 14 January 2011 <<http://www.buddytv.com/articles/lost/daddy-dearest-are-father-issue.5103.aspx>>. Ree Hines, “Shepherd’s Daddy Issues Multiply on *Lost*.” 28 February 2010. *MSNBC*. 14 January 2011 <<http://today.msnbc.msn.com/id/35552345/ns/entertainment-television>>.

<sup>5</sup> As Coontz notes, the most powerful and enduring visions of traditional family come from the 1950s sitcoms, as they largely determined the ‘standard’ family roles and values. Although there were families and a variety of father figures depicted in the early dramas (such as Ben Cartwright in *Bonanza* [1959-1973]), they proved less effective in setting the standard for traditional families in our cultural memory. This might also be due to the fact that most scholarly research that deals with portrayals of family and fatherhood in early television generally focus on sitcoms – it is nearly impossible not to include *Father Knows Best* and *Leave it to Beaver* from discussions of early television fathers. Another reason might be the continual syndication and popularity of the early sitcoms that would end up solidifying and strengthening their power in cultural memory.

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<sup>6</sup> I will not focus on any female characters in the show because the Oedipus complex, as Freud conceptualized it, is principally interested in the psychosexual development of the male child. Freud recognizes the limitation of his understanding of women by acknowledging that women's sexuality "is still veiled in an impenetrable obscurity" (*Three Essays on the Theory* 248) and that "the sexual life of adult women is a 'dark continent' for psychology" (*The Question of Lay Analysis* 38). Although Freud devoted much of his time to theorizing about women towards the end of his life, his account of female sexuality remains "incomplete and fragmentary" (Morrow 18).



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## LITERATURE REVIEW:

### A PSYCHOANALYTIC LOOK AT THE FATHER AND THE DECLINE OF PATERNAL AUTHORITY

When Freud conceptualized his father-centric theory of the Oedipus complex, it probably did not occur to him that one day his theory would prove inadequate for describing the human condition. At the time, he believed it to be a universal phenomenon, marking the psychic processes of human kind across history and culture:

[T]he Oedipus complex ... represents the peak of infantile sexuality, which, through its after-effects, exercises a decisive influence on the sexuality of adults. Every new arrival on this planet is faced by the task of mastering the Oedipus complex; anyone who fails to do so falls victim to neurosis. (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* 290)

According to Freud, every newborn (boy) infant experiences an incestuous love for his mother and unconscious hatred for his father and these ambiguous feelings felt for the parents produce his identity. He considers the Oedipus complex to be a universal and immutable phenomenon and an unvarying account of human development.

However, the Oedipus complex, like every mode of thinking, proves to be a product of its time. Sylvie Gambaudo views the Oedipus complex as a reflection of Freud's modernism – his insistence on resting the development of mankind on a single universal myth. She contends that “from the beginning, Freud attempts to find and map

one universal structure that would represent and explain the human subject” (61). In terms of the Oedipus complex, he takes a classical play (Sophocles’ *The Oedipus Rex*), declares it to be universal by drawing from his own experiences with his parents, and turns it into an abstract human principle that acts as a hidden essence at the core of the self. The Oedipal experience becomes an individual truth that resides in each of us, in our dreams and daily habits, or our personalities. However, far from being a universal mechanism, the Oedipus complex, writes Susannah Izzard, is deeply “embedded” in “the socio-political structures” of Freud’s world: “The figures in the Oedipal drama therefore can never be timeless icons, but are imbued with what Western culture has historically designated or required a father/mother to be” (3-8). Rather than being an objective discovery or truth, the Oedipus complex reifies the dominant values and norms of nineteenth-century society and Western culture in general. However, as Izzard notes, since Freud locates the Oedipus complex in the psyche of the individual, it has traditionally remained outside the domain of cultural criticism (3).

Yet, in the postmodern era, the Oedipus complex and psychoanalysis as a discipline repeatedly become subjects of criticism, partly due to the postmodern “incredulity towards metanarratives” (Lyotard xxiv). Postmodernism is characterized by, as Jean-Francois Lyotard famously suggests, the increasing distrust and widespread rejection of dominating metanarratives that seek to tell universal stories or construct universal truths. Being one such metanarrative, patriarchy that rests on the ‘natural’ supremacy of the father has gone through a crisis of faith, especially with the feminist proclamation that it is, by and large, an oppressive and unjust system of male dominance. With the growing disbelief in the father’s ‘universal’ function, the traditional father has

gradually lost his 'inherent' position of power, and fatherhood as a tradition has begun to be questioned. In the face of this cultural change, Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen writes, one is irresistibly drawn to ask if Freud's Oedipus complex, which rests on clear-cut (and what he thinks as universal and innate) gender roles, still makes sense when sexual difference and gender division are gradually dissolving (278).

In the postmodern era, the validity of the Oedipus complex, specifically the belief in the traditional function of the father, might have declined. But, I argue that the myth of the Oedipus complex still persists – not because it is inherent in human development, but because it is a powerful cultural construct – and the father still plays an important role in the process of subjectification. Even if the postmodern condition necessitates the fall of totalizing theories, what Lyotard describes as meta-narratives, I believe that the need to be attached to a stable figure, namely the father, continues to characterize the contemporary subject. As the subject becomes more disoriented, fragmented, and lost in an increasingly complex society, the search for a modernist foundation with the hope of attaining a unified and stable identity heightens.

While describing the postmodern condition, James Williams notes that "in the postmodern city, there is no possibility of a benevolent ruler uniting all the quarters under just one law" (28). However, in my view, postmodernity is not necessarily a break from the modernist cultural project, or as Lyotard assumes a "totally new condition" (Best and Kellner 171). Postmodernity is an ongoing process that still retains its connection with its past. As Zygmunt Bauman writes,

Postmodernity is no more (but no less either) than the modern mind taking a long, attentive and sober look at itself, at its condition and its past works, not fully

liking what it sees and sensing the urge to change it. Postmodernity is modernity coming of age; modernity looking at itself at a distance, rather than from the inside, making a full inventory of its gains and losses, psychoanalyzing itself, discovering the intentions it never before spelled out, finding them mutually cancelling and incongruous. (272)

Postmodernity critiques the typically modernist search for foundations and absolutes such as the ultimate Oedipal father, but it still maintains its ties with these universals. *Lost* manifests this in-between state by portraying fragmented and disoriented subjects as representative of postmodernity who proceed without absolute guidelines and definitive authority, as well as by centralizing their personal experiences as representative of modernity by placing 'daddy issues' at the center of its own narrative. Plurality of voices and multi-dimensionality of identities are reduced to a single originator: the father. This way, *Lost* demonstrates the impossibility of thinking about subjectivity outside of the frame of the Oedipus complex, at least not yet.

This rather short overview of the decline of the Oedipal family/father is more comprehensively explored in the following sections of this chapter. The next section reviews the orthodox teachings of Freud, especially his Oedipal model of subjectivity, which views the father as the key constituent of identity. Freud is followed by Lacan, as this section focuses on Lacan's reinterpretation of Freud's Oedipal model. Lacan, while modifying Freud's Oedipal construct substantially, reproduces its phallocentrism by reinscribing the function of the father. The subsequent section explores the transformation in Western societies that leads to the crisis of the Oedipal family while examining its consequences on individuals and their identities with a focus on the

emergent narcissistic personality. Lastly, it explores the aftermath of this decline, whether it should be celebrated as liberation from lack of authority or worried over as loss. In the end, I conclude by pointing out how the father's absence in contemporary era creates more dependency in children and thus provide a psychoanalytic basis for my discussion of *Lost*, which visualizes this dependency in its characters' constant search for stability and security embodied in the figure of the father.

### **Freud: The Oedipal and the Primal Father**

Freud's theory of the Oedipus complex can be interpreted as the first psychoanalytic theory that views the father as the primary figure in the process of subjectification. Paul Verhaeghe writes that "[t]he father of psychoanalysis is without doubt the man who elevated the importance of fatherhood to a hitherto undreamt-of level" by making him the kernel of sexual and mental growth (132). Freud's Oedipus complex can be described in its simplest form as follows<sup>1</sup>. In early childhood, the little boy develops an 'object-cathexis' for his mother – feeling of attachment to the mother's body, specifically her breast. He deals with the father by identifying himself with him. As Freud notes, "for a time these two relationships proceed side by side, until the boy's sexual wishes in regard to his mother become more intense and his father is perceived as an obstacle to them; from this the Oedipus complex originates" (*The Ego and the Id* 640). As the boy moves to the phallic stage, his focus shifts to his genitalia. The mother, then, becomes the object of sexual desire. The boy strives for a sexual union with the mother while his identification with his father "takes on a hostile coloring" (640) as the boy wishes for the disappearance/death of the father to take his place with the mother. Only with the recognition of gendered differences does the boy transform his hatred for the

father into identification with him. He realizes that his father also possesses the penis while his mother represents the lack of it. Concurrently, he recognizes the superiority and authority of the father at home, associates his power with his possession of the phallus and thus understands his capability of castrating him – the mother's lack of penis is evidence of this capability. This threat of castration causes the boy to abandon his desire for the mother and to value and identify with the father. As this repression marks the dissolution of the Oedipus complex, it also consolidates masculinity in a boy's character. Repression, or the father as the source of repression, becomes the essential element for the psychosexual development and entrance of the boy into society and culture.

The Oedipal model of subjectivity bestows several vital roles upon the father such as separator, protector, saviour, and liberator. As a separator, the father prevents the boy from dependency on the mother. He keeps him at a certain distance from his mother, forbidding them to form a single whole. This prohibition can also be interpreted as protection since the father protects the boy from, as Jessica Benjamin notes, "a mother who would pull... [him] back to what Freud called 'the limitless narcissism' of infancy" ("The Oedipal Riddle" 232). The father saves the child from a potential danger. His role as a protector/saviour is also linked to his role as a liberator. By liberating the boy from dependency and narcissism, the father leads him into reality and independence. As Benjamin writes, "the father is the only possible liberator and way into the world" and therefore "contains the equation of paternity with individuation and civilization" (235).

In addition to his roles during the Oedipal stage, the father also plays a crucial role in the psyche of the child as the voice of his super-ego. With the resolution of the Oedipus complex, a differentiation occurs within the psyche into ego and super-ego: ego,

deriving from the id, becomes the representation of the common sense of the external world while super-ego becomes the representation of the paternal authority and prohibition, a symbolic internalization of the father figure. The super-ego transforms the fear of external authority of the father to self-regulation and becomes the censor which “forbids certain thoughts, wishes, or desires” (Bocock 53). However, as Freud writes, the super-ego consists of not only prohibition, as in the precept: “you may not be like this (like your father),” but also an ego-ideal, as in the precept: “you ought to be like this (like your father)” (*The Ego and the Id* 641-2). Therefore, it promotes the father both as a fearful image and a model for imitation. Through the ego-ideal, the boy child comes to judge himself according to his parents’ standards, and at the same time is constantly reminded of his limits. This conflicting function of the super-ego becomes evident in Jack’s ambivalent relationship with his father, Christian. As I will further analyze in the next chapter, Jack strives not only to become like his father by acting in opposition to his wishes, but also to punish himself severely every time he fails to live up to his ego-ideal, the representation of the perfect self formed out of his father image. Consequently, by giving permanent expression to the influence of the father in the psyche, the super-ego makes the Oedipus crisis continue to exert profound influences throughout life.

The father in Freud’s work occupies a pivotal place in the early psychic development of the child: his entrance into society, formation of a conscience, and development of a separate ego. However, his essential role is not only restricted to the individual level. Freud believed that the father is the foundational source of all art, religion, philosophy, in short all constituents of civilization. In *Totem and Taboo* (1913), Freud develops his myth of the primal father out of a speculation that there existed a

primal father in humankind's early development, who was despotic and violent, keeping all the women for himself and treating his children unfairly. One day, his sons murdered and devoured their father. They hated him because he stood as an obstacle to their craving for power and sexual desires. But, not long after, "a sense of guilt made its appearance...with the remorse felt by the whole group" for murdering their father (*Totem and Taboo* 501). His elimination caused great longing and yearning. According to Freud, the contradictory feelings felt towards the father who is both the feared and envied model dates back to this primitive incident. He believed that the memory of this primal deed "may have been phylogenetically transmitted to the present day" (Moore and Fine 147) in the form of two fundamental taboos created out of the sense of remorse: incest and parricide, which corresponds to the two repressed wishes of the Oedipus complex. Freud also claimed that this sense of guilt is the very basis of religion, morals, and the whole patriarchal social structure. The father figure as well as the Oedipus complex is the origins of not only the individual psyche but also culture and civilization.

### **Lacan: The Symbolic Father**

Lacan shared Freud's view that the Oedipus complex is the underlying principle in the structuring of subjectivity. Like Freud, Lacan rested his view of psychic processes upon the primacy of the father. Actually, after Klein and Winnicott's emphasis on the fundamental role of the mother in early development, the influence of Lacan, as Etchegoyen writes, became "the main cause of the reappearance of the father as a presence in psychoanalytic theory" (29). In his early years, Lacan's account of the Oedipus complex did not differ prominently from Freud's. It was in the 1950s that Lacan showed radical breaks from Freud's conception of the Oedipus complex. It is impossible



to account for the transformations his theories have gone through within the scope of this section. For this reason, I will only review some of the contributions he made to extend Freud's Oedipus complex.

Lacan expanded the range of the Oedipus complex by introducing a triadic process in the formation of subjectivity: the imaginary/pre-Oedipal stage, the symbolic/Oedipal stage, and the Real. For Lacan, the Real is that which "resists symbolization absolutely" (Lacan 66) and that which is "impossible to imagine, impossible to integrate into the symbolic order, and impossible to attain in any way" (Evans 160). Once the infant enters into the imaginary and subsequently the symbolic order, there is no return to the Real where the infant enjoys union with the mother and has no sense of separation between itself and the external world.

This category can better be understood in connection with the categories of the imaginary and symbolic, both of which are inextricably intertwined and work in tension with the Real. The imaginary stage marks the primordial recognition of the infant's self and becomes the basis for the formation of the ego. It is closely tied to Lacan's theorization of the mirror stage, where the infant sees an image of itself reflected in a metaphorical mirror and assumes that it has a separate and unified self. However, this idea of the unified self is illusionary since "the self's new understanding of itself has come to it from the outside, in an image...[that] comes from, and remains part of, otherness itself" (Mansfield 43). The infant can only gain a sense of the self and form an ego in relation to an 'other.' This other takes the form of language in the symbolic order, the last of the tripartite scheme, where the infant hopes to gain the ideal self it thought it found in the mirror-image. Just like Freud's phallus, which becomes the fixed biological

component that stabilizes masculine and feminine identity (male as the owner of the phallus; female as its lack), language, for Lacan, becomes the system of meanings that offer the image of a complete and autonomous self. However, different from Freud's phallus that forms fixed identities, language, for Lacan, can never provide the subject a stable identity. It can only cover over a sense of lack and allow the subject to experience itself as a unity<sup>2</sup>.

Parental figures also play an important role in Lacan's triadic development. In the imaginary stage, the infant enjoys a dyadic relationship with the mother until the father intrudes into the illusionary world of the infant by breaking its imaginary link with its mother. The father appears as a castrating figure, the one who prohibits the infant from being the focus of the mother's desire. When the infant recognizes that it cannot satisfy the mother's desire because he is not the phallus and that the father is the one who possesses the phallus, a positive identification with the father ensues. This change in psychological organization represents the infant's transition from the imaginary to the symbolic order. It also marks the resolution of the Oedipus complex. For Lacan, writes Evans, "the Oedipus complex is the conquest of the symbolic order ... it is essential for the human being to be able to accede to a humanized structure of the real" (132).

What is revolutionary about Lacan's reformulation of the Oedipus complex, however, is that it interprets this complex as a symbolic process rather than an actual one. Unlike Freud who treats both the father and the penis as real entities, Lacan differentiates between the actual father/phallus and the symbolic father/phallus. For Lacan, the Oedipal father is a signifier or a metaphor rather than a flesh-and-blood person; it is an abstract function consisting of certain ideas associated (in many people's mind) with 'father.'

With this idea of metaphor, Lacan renames Freud's Oedipal father as the 'Name-of-the-Father' (also known as paternal function/metaphor, symbolic father, or the Law of the Father), "because it does not have to be the real father, or even a male figure, but is a symbolic position that the child perceives to be the location of the object of the mother's desire" (Homer 53). This fundamental signifier intervenes in the imaginary dual relationship between mother and child to make possible the entry of the child into the symbolic order and to introduce the law of the language system under which the child is positioned as a subject.

The symbolic father generally refers to the prohibitive function of the father, as the one who says 'no!' to the incest taboo in the Oedipus complex (Evans 122). He symbolizes power and authority, law and regulation, restriction and supervision. An actual father can occupy this position of the symbolic father by laying down the law at home, by uttering his prohibition for the actions of the mother and the child. However, as Bruce Fink explains, the existence of an actual father does not guarantee the fulfillment of this symbolic function. A mother can undercut her husband's position by disobeying his orders as soon as he turns back. For example, when the child violates a rule set by the father, the mother can undermine his authority by defending the child: "We won't tell your father about that" or "Your father does not know what he is talking about." In this way, "the paternal function may never become operative in cases where a child's father is clearly present" (81). Fink also talks about an exact opposite situation: the symbolic function of the father may be fulfilled despite the disappearance or the death of the father by the mother and by other father figures, or in other ways as well (79). For example, the mother might constantly bring up the father's name in her discourse, evoking the father's

‘No!’ as a barrier to the child’s actions. She might say: “your father would not like that,” or “your father would be very angry at this,” thus fulfilling the prohibitive role of the father.

Illustrating the difference between the symbolic and the actual father is important to demonstrate fatherhood as primarily a symbolic function – a name or a title associated with certain ideas (ideas of law, authority, stability and order). This idea will be fundamental later in my discussion of Jack and Locke’s father issues, as the physical absence of their fathers on the island does not necessarily mean that they are away from their influence, or, conversely, the physical presence of their fathers (for example Jack’s father Christian’s over-presence in his past life) does not necessarily mean that they are symbolically effective. Moreover, it is important to point out that the symbolic function of the father might be taken over by external figures on the island such as the island itself (for Locke), or performed in the character’s own psyche through their punitive super-egos as representative of their own fathers (for Jack).

### **The Decline of the Symbolic Father and**

### **The Emergence of Today’s Narcissistic Personality**

As I discussed in this chapter’s introduction, although Freud considers it a universal mechanism, the central and collective experience in everyone’s childhood, the Oedipus complex is merely a reflection of the values and norms of the society in which it was written. As Izzard points out, “*if* it determines identity and desire it does so *not* because it is an account of the male psyche but because it is an enshrinement of dominant patriarchal and heterosexist values” (11). Thus, it is important to remember that Freud’s theory of the Oedipus complex does not apply to biological realities but rather to an

fictional register inscribed in the Western culture as well as in the unconscious of every individual. By presenting the father as an indispensable need and a fundamental part of identity (therefore a biological reality more than a product of society), *Lost* perpetuates the mythic construct of the Oedipus complex and demonstrates its continuing presence both in the lives of the survivors and in society in general.

Since it is a product of its time, the Oedipus complex yields to change over time as the traditional family structure and roles (that it gives a psychic representation of) are transformed radically in society. Today's father no longer plays his role as before in the organization of family and society. As Jessica Benjamin notes, "Robbed of his activity and authority in public life, deprived of his economic independence, the male figure is no longer the mainstay, the ideal, the public representative nor the economic power of the family. The father as authority figure who could be respected, and with whom the child could identify, has been undermined by virtue of helplessness under monopoly capital" ("Authority and Family" 42). Indeed, the family crisis and the decline of the father's authority were addressed by Frankfurt School theorists as early as 1930s. For example, Horkheimer wrote in 1936 that "[a]s compared with periods in which it was the predominant productive community, not only has the family completely lost many of its former functions but even the ones left to it have been affected by changes in society as a whole" (101). For him (and for most of the Frankfurt School), the loss of paternal authority was an economically conditioned situation. During the transformation from one mode of capitalism (liberal, competitive) into another form of capitalism (post-competitive, state capitalist system), traditional family structures and subjectivity were largely modified.

In the first mode of capitalism, the father was a strong and autonomous figure, whose superiority at home was to be esteemed by both the mother and the children. His authority came primarily from his role as the provider of money, “which is power in the form of substance” (Horkheimer 105). As Horkheimer notes, the male child submitted to his father’s orders primarily because of his father’s role as the main provider, “independently of any consideration of the father’s human qualities” (107). Through internalization of his father’s authority, the child could develop an authority-oriented character and form a strong, autonomous ego. As David Held states, “psychoanalytic theory is drawn upon to explore the processes of the child’s identity formation in this situation” (129). In his theory of the Oedipus complex, Freud conceptualizes the type of strict father and autonomous individual that emerge during this early stage of capitalism. Although he neglects the role of socio-economic structures in the constitution of identity and generalizes the Oedipus complex as a universal human mechanism, as Horkheimer shows, the Oedipus complex is no more than an account of the psychic development of the child in the first mode of capitalist order, or in other words modernity.

So, with the transformation into the second mode of capitalism, both the characteristics of Oedipal parentage and the nature of subjectivity change. Horkheimer presents a number of factors that helped to undermine the legitimacy of the father’s authority in modern society: increasing rates of unemployment, which threaten the father’s role as provider; women’s movement from domestic to public sphere, which disempowers the father’s authority at home; and the takeover of educational functions by the state, which damages the father’s role as educator. Horkheimer believes that when the father declines in power, the capitalist system takes on his role, determining the demands

and prohibitions with which the individual identifies. As Alan How puts it, “the authority once exercised by the family and the father-figure, was being supplanted by the impersonal authority of the system... it was the system now that had to be obeyed, not the father-figure” (93). The changing nature of modern capitalism, which undermines the role of the traditional family and father, also brings with it a change in the nature of the subject. The formation of a strong and autonomous ego, which depends on the early conflict followed by identification with a powerful father figure, becomes more difficult as the subject ceases to identify with his father “as a source of moral autonomy” and “looks further afield for more powerful images of ‘superfathers’” presented to him by capitalism (How 94). Instead of the father, the subject becomes dependent on the capitalist system’s promotion of happiness, social acceptability, and beauty in the form of material goods. This process produces a more compliant individual, one whose identity is tied narcissistically to consumerism<sup>3</sup>.

For Christopher Lasch, narcissism is not an individual case anymore, as Freud thought it was, but a prevailing societal problem. He writes that in Freud’s time, “hysteria and obsessional neuroses carried to extremes the personality traits associated with the capitalist order at an early stage in development” (41). Later, as capitalism entered a new stage, the form of neuroses also changed. Psychiatrists were able to observe a new type of social individual who could not be described in classical Freudian terms – “who suffer not from ‘definitive symptoms’ but from ‘vague, ill-defined complaints’” (Lasch 42). This shift signified an underlying change in the organization of personality, from individual cases of hysteria to pathological narcissism. According to Lasch, narcissism emerges when enjoyment (the values of the id) replaces the symbolic prohibitive norms

(values of the super-ego). As he suggests, “the decline of parental authority reflects the ‘decline of the superego’ in American society” and consequently the emergence of the narcissist that reflects the character traits of “a corrupt, permissive, hedonistic culture” (178).

Lasch lays out some of the personality traits of narcissistic patients compiled from psychiatrists’ accounts of their patients’ symptoms. The narcissistic subject feels existence to be “futile and purposeless” (37), progressing in life without an aim to which he can direct all his endeavours. Rather, he drifts in the currents of a diffused life. As a result, he is always on the run looking for a guide, or an authority figure. He is “unappeasably hungry” to fill the inner void left by the father’s authority (38). “He depends on others for constant infusions of approval and admiration,” attaching himself to them, “living an almost parasitic existence” (39). Although he can gain a sense of self-esteem by attaching himself to someone, he often feels unhappy and depressed as the feelings of inner emptiness always reminds him that life is not worth living. Since he is fragile, the narcissist tends to “cultivate a protective shallowness in emotional relations” (37). He avoids commitment, in search of instantaneous pleasures that require no dependence or involvement. As a result of the disappearance of the security and protection associated with paternal authority, he is often angry and aggressive. He can release intense feelings of rage for both himself and for the objects outside. In relation to this, the absence of the internalization of authority also results in the formation of punitive super-ego in the narcissist. He “perceives everything as a potential threat to his precarious imaginary balance” (Žižek, *The Ticklish Subject* 368). As I will show in the next section, the whole social/economic structure of late capitalism capitalizes on this



new personality type, offering the illusion of unity and autonomy to the narcissist in the form of images/imaginary ideals.

### **Celebration or Loss:**

#### **What Happens After the Death of the Symbolic Father?**

The symbolic father has disappeared, maybe not completely but to a great extent, from the cultural landscape. The values and roles associated with the father-figure have largely lost their credibility. After this radical transformation of contemporary fatherhood, it is not clear whether we should grieve the loss or celebrate the father's death as liberation from his patriarchal authority. According to conservative critics (such as David Blankenhorn and David Popenoe), the loss of fatherhood correlates to many social ills such as rising rates of crime, juvenile delinquency, depleted morality, and destitution, to name a few. From their viewpoint, many of our social problems result from the absence of the father; therefore we should grieve over the destabilization of paternal authority. On the contrary, some feminists have drawn attention to nostalgia for a less male-dominated and more equal world order. For them, the shifting position of men/fathers represents liberation from rigid social and gender roles.

However, in my opinion, the focus should not be on the vices or the virtues of the former authoritarian father. Instead, the focus should be on the new position of the subject in this father-less order. What happens after the death of the symbolic father? While it might be assumed that the lack of paternal authority frees the subject, it also predisposes the subject to greater dependency on a capitalist system that replaces the father's authority. As Sylvie Gambaudo writes, in the absence of paternal prohibition, capitalism "capitalizes on pre-Oedipal need in order to re-create dependence of the

subject on the Oedipal level” (86). The subject becomes vulnerable to the illusions of capitalism which offers to fill the space left vacant by the father in the form of images and material objects. Horkheimer, writing in the 1930s, was the first to issue a warning about the dubious consequences of the waning of the father. As How explains, he reminded us “to be wary of the idea that the most advanced societies have liberated their members into a golden age of individual freedom” (111). Horkheimer was suspicious of this process of change because he thought that the vacancy of the father would be taken up and filled by other authorities and in fact, by culture itself. Subjects would be amenable to capitalism’s requirements “either in the form of consuming or performing” (How 104).

Slavoj Žižek also questions the apparent democracy that results from a lack of authority and the subsequent celebration of a new post-Oedipal subjectivity: “the problem here is not patriarchal authority and the emancipatory struggle against it, as most feminists continue to claim; the problem, rather, is the new forms of dependency that arise from the very decline of patriarchal authority” (*The Ticklish Subject* 344). “The new forms of dependency” Žižek notes are nothing more than the images/imaginary ideals created by capitalism to replace the paternal prohibitive norms. To illustrate my point, I would note that when the father does not intervene in the imaginary dual relationship between the mother and the child, the child cannot move from the imaginary to the symbolic order. He remains in the imaginary, becoming more and more incapable of separating himself from his image. He loses the ability to separate dream from reality; he “consumes pre-processed representations operating like real images and mistaken for the real” (Gambaud 22). In other words, without the father’s role as separator, the subject

identifies the images generated by capitalism as real. For Julia Kristeva, writes Gambaudo, “the whole social edifice” capitalizes on this situation [the subject’s failure to separate image from real] by offering to cure the discomforts in the form of tablets, software, slogans, images etc.” (84). Subjects increasingly cling to the imaginary world of success, social inclusion, beauty, and bodily fitness in order to construct their subjectivity.

However, while imaginary ideals acting as the capitalist form of paternal function offer psychological satisfaction and fulfillment, the result is often ephemeral and therefore the subject never really attains a secure and complete ground upon which it can construct its identity. The imaginary ideals (mistaken for the real) prove to be elusive and fractured, leaving identity in an ambivalent and fragmented position. As a result of the subject’s contingent position in the imaginary/capitalist order, the yearning for an absolute Oedipal paternal function capable of fixing the fluid identity becomes more pronounced. This point forms the core of my argument: the postmodern subject’s lingering and growing need to cling to paternal authority evokes its nostalgia for the rational and autonomous subject of modernity. The subject desires an absolute guide or definite authority figure that can secure its position and make it feel whole again. As Kristeva states, “after the father’s death, society behaves *as if* the father was still out there. Individuals know that the death of the father (God, the paternal function) means the end of his immanence and transcendental function, but by an act of faith, the symbolic contract is preserved” (qtd. in Gambaudo 68).

Consequently, what happens after the father’s death is that the subject carries on his function, and even attempts to renew its relationship with the father. This is one of the

salient features of the (failed) contemporary subjectivity that finds prominent representation in *Lost*. The survivors in the show are split between their struggle to break free from the influence of their fathers and the increasing need to reclaim the lost relationship with their fathers by renewing their ties, or finding other paternal figures to play the role of the father. My contention is that even though postmodernity has resulted in a decline in contemporary society's faith in traditional notions of psychoanalysis and fatherhood, these notions continue, on a mythic level, to underpin and govern identity formation in *Lost*. *Lost* subjects, feeling adrift without the guidelines of an authority figure, constantly search for a paternal substitute, sometimes in the form of an actual father, sometimes in the form of a universal agency or a divine figure, or sometimes in their struggle to 'fix things'.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The following description of the Oedipus complex only concerns the male child. As for the female development, Freud's views mainly focuses on a picture of women as defective men. Rather than understanding female sexuality as existing in its own right, Freud uses maleness as the benchmark of female identity. "In classical psychoanalytic theory, then, female identity is a secondary formation, not a primary one, and is based on an inherent, biologically based, insufficiency – the lack of a penis ... For example, a woman's wish for a child is viewed not as a uniquely female drive, grounded in female biology, but as a displaced wish for the missing male penis" (Ireland 95). For this reason, Freud has been criticized by feminists and women psychoanalysts for his *phallic monoism*, a term that pinpoints how his thesis posits the phallus/masculinity at the center of female identity. A true account of female sexuality and femininity remains a highly debated problem in psychoanalysis to this day.

<sup>2</sup> Out of this tripartite scheme, I predominantly focus on the symbolic stage, where the subject obtains an illusionary sense of stability and completeness through the acquisition of language and submission to the rule of the Law of the Father. I explore *Lost* survivors' nostalgia for their missing fathers, and how this nostalgia reveals a hidden (and also a socially designated and driven) desire to reach a sense of autonomous, rational, and unified identity that modern/Oedipal man thought he possessed. I do not focus whether a stable identity has ever existed and/or the search for unity has ever been resolved, more so than the desire or search itself.

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This preference might have resulted in a diminished (or, maybe even non-existent) focus on the other two categories of Lacan's triadic process: the imaginary and the Real. The Real, as I mentioned earlier, resists symbolization and subsists outside the cultural realm. As Catherine Belsey writes, the Real, "as culture's defining difference, does not form part of our culturally acquired knowledge, but exercises its own" (xii). Existing beyond the cultural and social sphere, the Real has not constituted an important part of my thesis. This is because I am principally interested in the myths and cultural constructs associated with the figure of the father, and thus the symbolic stage of representation. Nevertheless, I acknowledge that taking up the Real in my discussion would help in pointing out the impossibility of attaining a stable subject position, ideals that are associated with the father such as order, unity, and wholeness, and ultimately the father himself. It would also reveal the fallibility of the Oedipus complex in giving rise to the development of 'healthy' and 'normal' individuals. Although I do not go into detail of the Real in my discussion of *Lost* in this thesis, it will constitute an important part of my future research about the psychoanalytic implications of the father's decline.

<sup>3</sup> In his book, *The End of Dissatisfaction?* Todd McGowan offers a different approach to the underlying reasons of the decline of paternal authority from a Lacanian perspective. He thinks that the collapse of the symbolic father coincides with the transformation from a society of prohibition to a society of enjoyment. The absence of the traditional father "is a symptom of the emergence of the command to enjoy" (42). In the former society of prohibition, the symbolic father enforces prohibition in the subject and therefore acts as a barrier to enjoyment. He prevents the subject from experiencing *jouissance*, or commands it to enjoy as little as possible. Even if the subject is not happy with the prohibition imposed on its enjoyment, its boundaries and limits are defined by these very prohibitive norms thus making the subject believe in its totality and autonomy. With the shift from a society of prohibition to a society of enjoyment, the prohibitive father is increasingly erased from the social landscape. There is no room in the society of enjoyment for the traditional symbolic father "because his presence bars enjoyment and commands subjects to accept dissatisfaction" (42). The symbolic father, together with the belief in him, is murdered. From the ashes rises the new "anal father of enjoyment," who, in contrast to the authoritative father, does not set barriers to enjoyment, but rather commands it. He constantly reminds the subject that there is always more to enjoy; so the subject never feels satisfied or fulfilled.

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## **THE PAST SPILLING INTO THE PRESENT:**

### **JACK SHEPHERD AND THE PATERNAL ROOTS OF HIS FLAWED IDENTITY**

Jack Shepherd (Matthew Fox) opens his eyes in a dense jungle. He is lying on the ground, his face looking upwards at the slim trees extending to the sky. After a moment of disorientation, he struggles to his feet, checking his wound and his pocket where he discovers a liquor bottle reminiscent of a recent airplane experience. Suddenly, Jack sprints through the jungle, not knowing where he is going or what he will find. He emerges from the jungle to a pristine beach with golden sand and smooth, greenish ocean. This beautiful view is soon spoiled by the wreckage of a plane crash when Jack turns to his left.

Hours earlier Oceanic Flight 815, having taken off from Sydney scheduled to arrive in Los Angeles, hit turbulence and with a piercing crack divided into several pieces, each ending up in different locations on a tropical island. The fuselage crashed on the beach creating a harrowing scene: the debris rises in fumes, the sounds of the engine merge with the voices of the survivors shrieking in shock and yelling for help, some are crushed under falling wreckage, some are hurt by erupting remains of the plane, and others call out in desperation. In the midst of this drama, Jack stays inert for awhile. Then, he springs into action and runs towards the beach following the cries of the passengers scattered around the crash site. He pulls a man from underneath plane

wreckage, brings a pregnant woman to safety, and resuscitates a middle-aged woman with neither pulse nor breath.

Gradually, the chaos subsides, as people's reactions move from initial shock to acknowledgment of the crash. Forty-nine passengers, who were complete strangers to each other before the crash, start living together on the island. They establish a new community consisting of a diverse group of people of various ages, backgrounds, and nations – a South Korean couple, an African-American father and son, an Iraqi soldier, an American fugitive, and an overweight mental patient, to name a few. They set up a camp from the plane wreckage across the beach, circle around the fire at night talking of the probability of rescue, and plan their survival on the seemingly deserted island.

Jack becomes the de facto leader of the survivors. From the beginning, his inclination to take charge is responded to favourably by the group. His fellow survivors defer to his medical knowledge and assistance in case of a malady or injury. In addition to being the doctor of the camp, Jack also possesses leadership qualities such as a supreme sense of responsibility, strength, and determination that render him different from the rest of the survivors. He is able to take critical decisions during times of trouble, help people survive in harsh conditions, and participate in several missions no matter how dangerous they are, due to his desire to keep everyone safe. His sense of group mentality, summarized in his motto “live together, die alone,” favours the well-being of the group over the individual, including himself.

When all these favourable qualities are considered, Jack might seem a selfless hero, a man of courage and strength who can risk his life to protect his group. However, Jack's leadership is not without flaws and errors. As much as he is beneficial for the

entire group, he can be quite destructive, especially when his often impulsive decisions put others' lives in danger. His overly protective attitude towards his fellow survivors can easily turn into aggressive behavior if he perceives an external threat to their safety. In this way, he can be over-controlling, irrational, and angry. This is one of the ways *Lost* differs from other castaway narratives that conventionally depict the island life/castaways as either benign – settling the island without harming the nature, building shelters, domesticating animals, and finding real joy in island life – or malignant – refusing to stay on the island and adapting to the natural life and original inhabitants<sup>1</sup>. The *Lost* survivors are not stereotypical, but are often presented multi-dimensionally with complex backgrounds and personalities. As with other survivors, Jack possesses some good qualities such as self-reliance, heroism, and selfless devotion to the wellbeing of his fellow survivors. But at the same time, he frequently displays infelicitous behavior such as obstinacy, impulsiveness, and quick temper. He seems self-assured on the surface, but underneath he is extremely anxiety-ridden and insecure.

In a similar respect, the island seems an uncorrupted, heaven-like place, away from the bustle of the civilized world. Jack naively believes in the first days that the island is an opportunity for them to make a fresh start. In the episode “Tabula Rasa” (2004), he tells Kate (Evangeline Lilly) soon after he learns she is a fugitive: “It doesn’t matter Kate, what we were, what we did before the crash. Three days ago we all died. We should be able to start over.” Jack thinks that the island can erase the shades of his past and give him a chance to start over. The title of the episode supports his belief/illusion: *tabula rasa*, philosopher John Locke’s empirical conception, often translated as ‘blank slate,’ implies that the castaways are born anew (or ‘blank’) after the crash, having a



chance to rejuvenate themselves<sup>2</sup>. While it is true that the island offers the possibility of change and redemption for some, Jack is not one of those people – for him, the island constantly revives the old memories (as apparent in its projection of his father's ghost) that function as a curse rather than an aid in his quest for the right action.

The past keeps spilling into Jack's current life, shaping his behaviour and judgment. His distant childhood and adolescent memories, as well as episodes from his fairly recent past that are revealed through flashbacks, burden him on the island, affecting his interactions with other survivors. His father, Christian (John Terry), who is featured in almost all of these past memories, plays a central role in determining Jack's psychology and influencing his perception of events on the island. His father's psychological influence on Jack is evident in Christian's reincarnation on the island – even though Christian dies in Sydney before the crash, he often appears on the island. Christian on Jack is evident in his In this way, he haunts Jack not only in his psyche as a hidden construct, but also literally as a ghost. Therefore, Jack is never (either psychologically or physically) away from his father's profound influence on his self-identity. His father lies at the center of his formation and position of subjectivity; the roots and dynamics of his character development are found in the nature of their conflicted relationship. In this chapter, I take an in-depth look at Jack Shepherd and analyze the deficiencies in his physical and social skills, most importantly, his self-image, by linking them to his father complexes. My analysis is comprised of three sections: the first one explores Jack's character development, his identity crises and character flaws, by taking examples from the first three seasons of the series; the second section examines the time Jack spends in the outside world following his rescue, exploring the circumstances of his depression off

the island; the third and last section analyzes Jack's quest for a renewal of identity, triggered by his decision to go back to the island.

Consequently, by psychoanalyzing Jack's character, I reveal the psychic importance of his father complexes, and therefore the mythic construct of the Oedipus complex that structures his life and the narrative of the show as a whole. I demonstrate how, by positing Christian at the center of Jack's character construction, the show perpetuates Freud's belief that attributes a fundamental role to the father in the formation of the individual psyche and the social identity, ideas enshrined in his theory of the Oedipus complex. Thus, despite portraying Christian as a failed father – a weak, drunken man stripped of traditional authority and power – the show, I argue, takes a conservative view of fatherhood by linking Jack's failed character to his relationship with his father, which remains problematic and unresolved for six seasons.

### **Jack's Split Personality:**

#### **A Hero and/or a Failure**

Jack Shepherd, the chief leader and caretaker on the island, lives up to his name by keeping his group together and protecting them against various threats. As Janne Drangsholt points out, Jack's last name "is clearly symbolic in its evocations of Christ's reference to himself as a 'good shepherd'" (216), reflecting his position as the leader and potential saviour. The suggestion inherent in this name is further indicated in the episode "Stranger in a Strange Land" (2007), where a local Thai girl named Achara (Bai Ling), who claims to possess the gift of "seeing who people are" tells Jack what she sees about him: "you are a leader, a great man, but this makes you angry, frustrated, and lonely." This is Jack in a nutshell: he has the qualities that make him a great leader, but the same

qualities also make him an over-zealous, hyper-competitive, and ultimately flawed man. He is driven by a constant desire to succeed, yet when this desire is overshadowed by his fear of failure, he readily succumbs to anger and impulsiveness. He oscillates between feelings of success and failure, confidence and self-doubt, and is often tormented by this continual internal battle. As Tess Forrest explains, these are the inconsistent and unbalanced experiences of the narcissist, as he “is caught on the fence of conflicting and contradictory needs, feelings, and experiences of himself: impotence and omnipotence, impulses of surrender and imperiousness, emotive responses of inhibition and explosion, expectations of adulation and abandonment” (93).

Jack’s ebbs and flows on the island might have appeared shallow, lacking any depth and foundation had they not been tied to his background story. As Jason Mittell states, “by providing insights into the characters’ pre-island lives, the flashbacks establish character depth and share restricted story knowledge with viewers that the other islanders lack” (*Television and American Culture* 265). Being a part of the show’s complex narrative structure, flashbacks, by interrupting the flow and fragmenting the time, also reflect character fragmentation and identity disruption. For instance, Jack’s disintegration of identity – his oscillation between heroic doctor and failed leader – would have no basis/explanation without flashback segments that disrupt the island narrative to illuminate his otherwise inexplicable actions and motives by linking them to his past. As Damon Lindelof notes in an interview:

The mythology is very important and we don’t throw it away piecemeal. But at the same time, we approach every episode as, this is a Jack [Matthew Fox] episode;

we're going to explain a little more why the guy needs to fix things all the time and let the island story support that obsession. (Ryan)

Through the exploration of his past relationship with his father, the show suggests that Jack's dysfunctionality, his constant need to "fix things," is rooted in his paternal problems.

In *Lost*, flashbacks are not self-standing as independent plotlines, but are directly connected to the central island narrative. They advance the present-day plot through thematic parallels and connections, but more importantly blend the past with the present to demonstrate the lingering influence of the past on the present lives of the survivors. As Ivan Askwith contends, "*Lost's* narrative teaches us that we must decipher the past in order to understand the present. Yet in doing so, *Lost* offers an implicit promise that the past will provide meaning to the present, and as such, that the past was written before the present" (172). On the island, the controversial choices Jack makes are often paralleled in flashback segments that focus on his past life where he makes similar decisions. His flaws (such as his stubbornness, over-involvement, and obsessive need to "fix everything"), which wreck his marriage and his relationship with his father in his pre-crash life, infiltrate his island existence, molding and challenging his leadership position, interpersonal skills, and more importantly self-image. Rather than a blank new page, the island becomes a continuation of his former life, as the two separate realms intermingle to create parallel narrative threads in which Jack frequently repeats the same mistakes and undergoes the same crises.

For example, in the episode "White Rabbit" (2004), we see how the past affects Jack's present leadership through the cause-effect relationship established between his

backstory and island narrative. The ongoing island storyline is continually cut by flashback segments that provide information about (and unearth the latent cause of) Jack's fluctuating view of his leadership. The episode opens with a close-up of young Jack's eye, as he is lying on the ground and being bullied by some friends. With a "whoosh" sound effect, we are conveyed to the present time, when Jack is hastily called out for help to save a young woman from drowning. Jack dives in and swims to rescue her, but finds Boone (Ian Somerhalder) in need of assistance. By the time he pulls Boone back to the beach, it is too late for Jack to go back out after the woman, and all he can do is to stand there as her screams die out. After this incident, Jack blames himself for her death: "I didn't try. I just decided not to go after her." Gradually, he adopts a self-defeating demeanour and retreats from his leadership position. When Hurley (Jorge Garcia) and Charlie (Dominic Monaghan) ask his opinion about water shortage, Jack retorts angrily, saying he does not want to decide anything. At that moment, the narrative flashes back to Jack's childhood, as he is standing in front of his father with a black eye from his recent school fight. Talking over a glass of whiskey, Christian advises his son: "You don't want to be a hero, you don't want to try to save everyone, because when you fail, you just don't have what it takes<sup>3</sup>."

The show connects this childhood memory of Jack to the tragic occurrence on the island by relating the reason of Jack's inflated desire to save the woman from drowning to his father's early caution that he should not try to be a hero all the time because he cannot live with the consequences. As we see in his contrary response, Jack acts in opposition to his father's wishes (evident in his failed attempt to save the woman), probably driven by a desire to prove him wrong, to prove that he has "what it takes."

However, his motivation for success also instills in him a substantial fear of failure – when he fails, as he does in saving the woman, he is severely tortured by his internal world (“You did not try hard enough!”). “White Rabbit” has a special place in Jack’s overall narrative, because it offers hints about his early (problematic) relationship with his father. Christian’s remark that Jack does not “have what it takes” exists as an underlying motivation behind most of his heroic actions, and resurfaces in other episodes in later seasons<sup>4</sup>.

Even though in “White Rabbit” Jack’s on-island narrative – his self-inquiry and reluctance to embrace leadership – is ostensibly resolved at the end of the episode when he takes up his role as the leader, Jack’s self-doubt and punishment never reach a true resolution. Every time he fails or is about to fail, his low self-confidence and skepticism come back as the remainder of his conflicted relationship with his father. This idea is clarified in a scene in the episode “All the Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues” (2004), where Jack, frantic in his search for the abducted Charlie and Claire (Emilie De Ravin), makes a last attempt to find their abductor, Ethan, saying, “I will not let him do this. Not again.” We know from the intersecting flashback segment, where Jack witnesses the death of a patient due to his father’s habitual intoxication, that Jack transposes his struggle with Ethan onto his struggle with his drunkard father. At this moment of transposition, Jack perceives an outside reality, his rivalry with Ethan, in terms of a past (repressed) memory. In Freudian terms, this is an example of projection, “an intrapsychic process that creates or shapes a perception...with reference to an object in the outside world, which although the subject believes he or she is perceiving it ‘objectively,’ is actually being perceived according to the subject’s own characteristics” (Perron 2: 1335).

Jack constructs a notion of the external world on the basis of his inside world, blurring the boundaries between psychic reality and the surrounding world. The narrative structure reinforces this blurring by blending flashbacks, which act as Jack's psychic space that retains the repressed memories that have influenced him most in his life, with the present or outside reality. Flashbacks appear abruptly and out of order to interrupt the narrative flow, just as repressed memories pop up unintentionally and disrupt the flow of life. Through Jack's flashbacks, which evoke his memories, we are able to see that his father exists as an unconscious/mythic construct in his psyche, dictating the way he perceives the events on the island.

While analyzing the psychoanalytic views about the importance of paternal function in character formation, it becomes obvious that Jack's development is adversely affected by his father's absence, particularly his unresolved Oedipus complex<sup>5</sup>. As Freud writes in his famous paper, "The Dissolution of the Oedipus Complex" (1924), "the destruction of the Oedipus complex is brought about by the threat of castration" whose source is the father (664). In other words, it is only through the boy child's acceptance of the possibility of castration, followed by his identification with the father and internalization of his authority and power, that the Oedipus complex can be resolved completely. If paternal identification and internalization do not occur effectively, the complex "persists as an unconscious state in the id and will later manifest its pathogenic effect" (664), as in the case of Jack. Clearly, Jack does not develop a positive father-identification in his adult life by acknowledging his father's castrating power. He instead perceives him as a potential competitor and as his equal rather than his superior. In "All the Best Cowboys Have Daddy Issues" Jack reports his father to a review board that

revokes his license and ends his career. His betrayal is obviously reinforced by his drive towards a re-enactment of the Oedipus complex, but this time, in a reversed version, he threatens his father with a (symbolic) castration. As Jessica Benjamin notes, this situation is a societal problem brought about by the “changes in the family in terms of less visible models for identification and weaker emotional bonds to mitigate parental power over children” (“Authority and the Family Revisited” 49). She explains that “the power over the child develops in him/her the fear of external authority, and this fear is no longer replaced by internalization and identification with emotional figures” (49). Contemporary sons no longer identify with their fathers “as the source of moral autonomy” (How 94). Since Jack, as a constructed television character, embodies ideologies, values, and norms of his immediate society, his impertinence to his father can discursively be read as a reproduction of the disrespect contemporary sons adopt toward their fathers in relation to the declining symbolic power and position of the father in society.

The absence of an effective father, according to R. R. N. Carvalho, causes narcissistic damage in the child (342). One such narcissistic damage is the extension of infantile omnipotence – the child’s not-yet repressed tendencies towards the gratification of basic needs and drives – to the adult life. Freud believes that a normative outcome of the Oedipus complex means that the child has successfully moved from his symbiotic relationship with the mother, conquered the infantile illusion of oneness, and placed himself in the outside world by forming a separate and autonomous self. In the case of an unresolved complex, the child is left fixated at a primitive, “pre-Oedipal level of development” (Jones 56). Without the repression imposed by the external reality/father on his sense of omnipotence and grandiosity, the child cannot conquer his infantile



narcissism and stays (in his adult life, too) exclusively focused on itself and satisfying his own needs. Jack's behaviors – his violent responses when he feels that his authority is under question or his over-controlling attitude when he wants no detail out of his control – generally indicate that he has not yet overcome his infantile narcissism, and is still governed by the primitives drives of omniscience and omnipotence. Marc Oromaner also points this out in his analysis of Jack's character: "As a skilled and successful surgeon with an ego, he seems to have a bit of a God complex and, for this reason, believes himself omniscient" (60). For example, in "A Tale of Two Cities" (2006), he obsessively asks Sarah, his ex-wife, who she dates and has a bad temper when she refuses to answer. As Oromaner puts it, "he hates being left in the dark about anything ... and when he can't find out, he jumps to conclusions, pointing the finger at his father" (60).

In the absence of the father, Freud also claims that the subject's ability to self-regulate and self-discipline are minimized, giving way to the development of a weak, precarious super-ego. The child forms a solid superego through identification with his father as the supervising and controlling agency. The superego development, as Martin Silverman contends, continues during adolescence and adulthood, and "renders the individual more able to control himself, and less in need of a powerful policeman to keep him in check" (38). Without a well-structured and autonomous super-ego, the subject has problems related to self-regulation, self-observation, and moral consciousness. Jack's unfavorable leadership qualities – his inability to keep his anger in check and suppress his aggressiveness – are understood, in psychoanalytic terms, as the outcome of his lacking a strong, autonomous super-ego. Jack constantly falls prey to his own impulses, and has trouble in molding them into acceptable forms. As his inner turmoil never settles down,

he can never see his father, as Silverman describes in another context, “*more realistically*” and “become *less troubled* by his libidinal inclinations towards him” (38). Normally, as Freud believes, the resolution of the Oedipus complex and the consolidation of the super-ego replace the ambivalent Oedipal feelings toward the father with identification with him. However, with Jack, the ambivalence inherent in the Oedipal situation never resolves and continues to mold his perception of his father, as he is torn between the two contradictory impulses towards him: an affectionate one and an equally hostile one. His hostility towards Christian is demonstrated in “A Tale of Two Cities” in the form of physical assault while his attachment is expressed in the act of his becoming a surgeon by following in his father’s footsteps.

Before moving on, I want to draw attention to the social/historical specificity of Jack’s narcissistic character. Lasch argues that narcissism is not an individual problem anymore in our society, but a social one, and the prevalence of narcissistic personality disorders should serve as an indication of its social pathology (32-3). While tracking the emergence of narcissism (as a social personality type), Lasch emphasizes the collapse of the father’s symbolic authority as the root cause: the decline of paternal discipline and control brought about the decline in the development of the values of self-discipline and self-restraint, leading to the formation of a society in which super-ego values are no longer fundamental and instead narcissism predominates as the most prevailing social identity (178-9). So, it is possible to contextualize Jack’s narcissism with regard to the culture of narcissism, or narcissism epidemic in American society. As a televisual construct and an embodiment of social/cultural values, Jack represents the prevailing narcissistic personality in society. As his conflict with his father can be read discursively

as an enactment of the problems related to father absence in the larger outside world, his fragile, weak super-ego and narcissistic character can be read as the reflection of the decline of the super-ego and the emergence of narcissism in American society as a whole.

Jack's narcissistic character remains largely unchanged well into the third season. During the nearly one hundred days he spends on the island before rescue, Jack generally repeats the same mistakes out of his obsessive need to know, act, and win. He has been told on several occasions by his friends and even his enemies that he does not know how to "let go" – let things run their own course and develop naturally. Jack's obstinacy often brings him into conflict with, among others, John Locke (Terry O'Quinn): Locke's faith-based, idealistic approach creates a clash with Jack's choice-based pragmatic approach. In the first season, Locke discovers a large steel entrance embedded in the ground – that comes to be known as 'the hatch' among the castaways – and after many repeated attempts, finally finds a way to break open its door. Soon after, he finds out that a man called Desmond (Henry Ian Cusick) has been entering some random numbers into a computer every 108 minutes in the unsubstantiated belief that this will "save the world." When Jack learns about the hatch and the button, he thinks they are all part of an experiment, a mind game, while Locke enthusiastically takes charge of the duty of pressing the button. Their divide is apparent in a dialogue exchanged in the episode "Orientation" (2005):

Jack: It's not real. Look, you want to push the button, you do it yourself.

Locke: ...Why do you find it so hard to believe?

Jack: Why do you find it so easy?

Locke: It has never been easy! Maybe you should just do it ... It is a leap of faith, Jack.

Locke argues for destiny, believing everything happening on the island has a hidden purpose while Jack always looks for rational reasons for his belief. He is a man of science, doubting anything that falls short of his sensory perception, and he remains this way for much of the first three seasons. Only after his rescue from the island does Jack show signs of transformation, beginning with a severe depression and followed by a drastic decision to return to the island.

### **Jack's Depression:**

#### **A Castaway off the Island**

Towards the end of the third season, a new hope arrives on the island from the sky: a girl named Naomi Dorritt (Marsha Thomason) makes an emergency landing on the island when her helicopter malfunctions. She tells the survivors that she is a part of the search and rescue boat that is miles away from the island and, by using her satellite phone, can contact her crew and get the survivors rescued. Jack, who has just returned after being captured by the island's original inhabitants, known as 'The Others,' with one of the Others, Juliet (Elizabeth Mitchell), and has thus lost the camp's trust, sees this as an opportunity to reclaim his role as the leader. In "Through the Looking Glass" (2006), the last episode of the third season, he leads his fellow survivors to the radio tower to unblock Rousseau's early signal and call Naomi's ship for rescue. On his way, he confronts Benjamin Linus (Michael Emerson) and John Locke, both of whom attempt to dissuade him from contacting the boat, claiming that Naomi and her people intend to do

them harm rather than saving them. Jack refuses to listen to their pleas, picks up the phone, and nevertheless makes contact with the freighter.

As Janne Drangsholt suggests, we watch the last episode of the third season “with an anticipation that a return to the real world will be attended by some sense of fulfillment for the characters involved” (218). We believe that Jack’s determined quest for rescue will result in contentment and comfort for everyone, and give validation to his leadership. However, with a surprising plot twist at the end, we learn that Jack will regret his decision later; his firm resolution will not satisfy everyone’s anticipation, but will result in failure.

The parallel storyline featuring Jack in severe depression – that we think is another flashback, a past period of crisis – turns out to be a flash-forward to a time Jack manages to leave the island. It glimpses Jack’s future life: his drug abuse, alcoholism, and depression, and makes us realize that the events happening on the island are part of a devious scheme. As Drangsholt contends, this narrative strategy, the replacement of the flashbacks by the flashforwards, is crucial to the development of the narrative because “it comprises Jack’s *hamartia*, the error in judgment which transforms Jack from a fearless leader to a tragic hero” (219). According to Aristotle, a tragic hero suffers a total “reversal of fortune” that is brought upon him “not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgment” (Mishra 80). The hero does not deserve his misfortune, but he causes it by committing an error in ignorance (*hamartia*), which is the inevitable outcome of his (imperfect) character. Jack’s *hamartia* grows out of his virtue: his heroism and supreme sense of responsibility bring about his tragic flaw when he, as a stubborn leader, refuses to listen to anyone else’s counsel, as revealed in the final scene of “Through the Looking

Glass.” He impulsively sets off for the radio tower and, as we learn later from flash-forwards, he regrets his decision and sinks into depression, which defines the kind of pathological self-destruction that follows from narcissistic behaviour (Forrest 92-3).

As a tragic hero, Jack experiences a reversal of fortune (tragic downfall) in the real world after his revelation and regret that the tragedy surrounding him can be traced to no one but himself. He gradually becomes disheveled and depressed, as he succumbs to alcohol and drugs. He even attempts to commit suicide by climbing up onto a bridge, but backs out when distracted by the sound of a crash behind him. As Matthew Fox comments on his character in an interview, Jack is “so loaded and emotionally distraught that he talks about his father as if he is still alive ... [he] is losing track of any concept of time” (Snierston). Haunted by memories and feelings of guilt, lack, and displacement, Jack does not find the happiness and comfort he thought he would find back home. He was a castaway on the island, and now he is a castaway off the island, “signaling that” his quest “has not yet reached its conclusion” (Drangsholt 222).

Jack’s disorientation in the outside world is transmitted to the viewer by the use of an irregular time sequence in the flash-forwards. The flash-forwards do not generally follow a linear timeline. We are told, for example, that Jack will be depressed and suicidal after he gets off the island in “Through the Looking Glass,” but we are kept in dark about the details as to how many years have elapsed since he left the island, or what happened in the meantime. Why and how did he become depressed? What did he mean when he told Kate “I’m fed up of lying”? Without these vital points, the flash-forwards create viewing confusion and disorientation by mimicking Jack’s own experience in the outside world. By creating a need for organizing future erratic events, the flash-forwards

encourage viewers to identify with Jack who strives to organize his life in the outside world to make sense of his fragile existence.

The remorse Jack feels for making a tragic mistake increases his yearning to go back to the island with the hope of compensation. He begins flying across the Pacific every weekend, praying to crash and return to the island. His apartment is full of maps, global coordinates, calculations, and flight schedules as a sign of his obsessive need to go back. Much later, in the episode “Life and Death of Jeremy Bentham” (2009), we learn that John Locke, who leaves the island voluntarily to bring the escaped castaways back, is the person behind Jack’s obsession to return. One day, he visits Jack in the hospital and implores him to return, protesting that it is their destiny. His visit leaves an indelible impact on Jack. This is because he directs the source of his plea to Jack’s father, saying that it was Christian<sup>6</sup> who told him to move the island and bring everyone back. Hearing his father’s name from a stranger strikes Jack immediately, and spurs his later decision to go back to the island.

By transmitting Christian’s message to Jack, Locke reconnects the father and the son. In time, Jack’s former views of Locke (and destiny) change, as he comes to accept Locke as a father-substitute. This idea is representationally demonstrated in “316” (2009) when Jack is asked to give the dead Locke something belonging to his father so that he can act as a proxy for Christian Shepherd in their journey back to the island (they need to recreate the original crash as closely as possible). By putting his father’s shoes on Locke, Jack agrees to take a “leap of faith” for the first time and embarks on the Aijira flight to return to the island, which will soon loosen him from the solid foundations of reason and turn him into a man of faith.

## **Jack's Transformation:**

### **A New Quest on the Island**

Jack wakes up in the same bamboo field as he did when he first crashed on the island. He hears Hurley crying for help and starts running towards his direction. While pulling him out of the deep water, he notices Kate lying unconscious, and awakens her. The new castaways realize that they have managed to return to the island without actually crashing, but this rather odd realization soon gives way to a more bizarre fact when they are found by their former fellow survivor, Jin (Daniel Dae Kim), in an old Dharma jumpsuit.

Jack, Kate, and Hurley learn that they travelled back in time to the year 1977. After they left, Benjamin Linus moved the island, causing the rest of the survivors to experience time flashes wherein they would suddenly be transported to another point in time in the island's history. The time shifts finally stayed fixed in the year 1974 when Locke volunteered to stop them by moving the frozen wheel back onto its axis. The ones that were left behind – Sawyer (Josh Holloway), Miles (Ken Leung), Juliet, and Jin – were recruited by the Dharma Initiative, a research project that occupied the island during the 1970s, and resided in its camp in peace and comfort for three years until their escaped friends unexpectedly turned up in 1977.

When Jack starts living in the 1977 Dharma village, he shows signs of a radical change. He acts less assertively and controlling, accepting problems with composure rather than giving irrational responses. He even acknowledges that Sawyer, now Dharma's head of security, is in charge when he tells Jack, "All you gotta do is go home, get a good night's rest. Let me do what I do" ("Namaste" 2009). His new position as a



janitor (ironically replacing his role as the leader) also suggests that he is no longer in position of power and authority. While renouncing his role as the chief leader, Jack surrenders to the ideas of fate and destiny. He comes to believe that everything happening on the island is a part of the pre-determined course of the universe and works toward an inevitable end. For example, in the episode “Whatever Happened, Happened” (2009), when Sawyer tries to convince him to operate on young Ben, who has been shot, Jack refuses saying that he will not intervene in the nature’s process and put his trust on the island instead: “when we were here before, I spent all of my time trying to fix things. But did you ever think that maybe the island just wants to fix things itself? Maybe I was just getting in the way.” Jack undergoes an extraordinary transformation from an over-controlling, skeptical leader to a spiritual one; from a man of science to a man of faith. He finally takes the “leap of faith” John Locke insistently called for, and in a way replaces him as the island’s spiritual head.

In season five, with his newfound faith on the island, Jack leads the march to the Swan station construction site in an attempt to detonate the bomb to reset time so that their flight never crashes on the island. He relies on Daniel Faraday’s (Jeremy Davies) theory that if they prevent Dharma from building the swan hatch, which will, about 20 years later, cause the Oceanic 815 to crash, they can forestall the entire chain of events that led to the crash, and therefore change their destiny. Even though Jack shows an unwillingness to interfere in and change the course of events earlier, he adamantly supports Daniel’s plan. Some of his friends including Kate try to dissuade him, stating that resetting their lives will also mean resetting their most precious memories, but Jack sticks to his belief that he has to fulfill this mission because it is the reason why he is

back on the island. He confesses to Kate “Nothing in my life has ever felt so right” (“The Incident” 2009).

Back on the island, Jack is on the lookout for a greater meaning and purpose to repair his broken self. From the first time that viewers see him – in the pilot episode, frantically attending to those in desperate need – Jack was a man of action, a man who only believed in what he could see and rationalize. After his tragic fall, he gradually broke away from the confines of reason and attached himself to the precepts of faith. Daniel A. Balcom notes that many sons abandoned by their fathers “have sustained damage to their sense of worthiness throughout their lives.” Jack had already been struggling with a core sense of inadequacy (as apparent in his ebbs and flows in leadership) when he committed his tragic mistake and became as weak and helpless as he ever was. Recognition of his flaw augmented his feelings of unworthiness and low self-esteem, creating the need for a secure ground, an anchor, to heal his weakened self. Jack found the solution in clinging to the ideas of fate and destiny with the hope of fulfilling his need for protection and enhancing his self-esteem. By believing that he is on the island for a reason, Jack can feel worthy, a special someone appropriated for a particular service for the island. By believing in the-island, Jack can believe in himself.

Freud contends that rites of religious traditions are indispensable ways of evoking and meeting emotional needs of human beings as they can have recuperative effects. In *The Future of an Illusion*, he points to the psychical origin of religion, arguing that religious beliefs and actions are all, in their psychological nature, illusions derived from the most urgent human wishes (42-3). For Freud, religious beliefs “can *never* be entirely imaged or reimagined in the minds of religious believers separate from the parental

images and representations formed in early years of childhood” (Bingaman 83). The conflicts of childhood arising from father complexes – accompanied by the infantile feelings of helplessness and need for protection – “make it necessary to cling to the existence of a father, but this time a more powerful one” (*Future of an Illusion* 41) who is believed to allay fears and relieve pains. From this point of view, Jack’s renewed quest on the island can be read as an attempt to overcome his unresolved Oedipus complex; his belief in fate can be seen as a mask for his hidden motivation: the desire for paternal security and protection.

However, as much as Jack wants to change his deeply flawed self by resigning himself to his fate, he eventually retreats to his former competitive and stubborn character. At the end of season five, the old Jack resurfaces with a resolute scheme to detonate the bomb and restart the past, turning a deaf ear to his friends’ warnings and attempts to deter him from his plan. Just as at the end of season three, where he refuses to listen to others’ counsel, Jack stubbornly sticks to his mission and thus repeats his *hamartia* (his lack of recognition) that again results in failure and causes a further internal retreat and reflection. In “The Incident” (2009), Rose and Bernard, the survivors of Oceanic 815 who start a peaceful, secluded life after time-travelling (away from the violence and drama that other survivors have always been involved with), point to the ridiculousness of other survivors’ actions when they say: “you travel 30 years back in time, and you still shoot each other.” Even if he changes his location, and even his time, Jack can never relinquish his old personality. As long as his inner turmoil does not settle down (when he overcomes his fluctuating Oedipal feelings and needs), Jack will always be in search of a paternal substitute with the hopes of attaining a unified, coherent self.

He attempts to change external circumstances, hoping that his attempt will change his inner circumstances; he longs to conquer the outside world through constant achievements, hoping that it will help him conquer his own turbulent inner world. Even in the sixth season, when he volunteers to replace Jacob (Marc Pellegrino), the island's ageless protector, Jack is driven by the same desire to "fix things." He still shows signs of a God-complex, believing that his mission to save the island from Jacob's nemesis involves a greater purpose to "save the world." When he dies (sacrifices himself) at the end, he is still trying to find the meaning of his fragmented and lost sense of self. He closes his eyes, reverses the opening sequence of the series, and therefore indicating that his quest on the island finishes in the same way as it commences. He is lost and in search of something when he both arrives and leaves the island for the last time.

In conclusion, through my reading of Jack's character development, I demonstrate the centrality of his paternal conflict in his identity formation, in shaping and organizing much of his actions and behaviors on and off the island. Hence, I present his father, Christian, as the underlying reason behind his typical narcissistic behavior: his craving constant adulation, his becoming angry and moody when criticized and depressed by failures. From the beginning, Jack's obsessive need for success is revealed as a reaction to his father's early remark that he does not "have what it takes," which reflects his psychological desire to conquer the unresolved threat of castration. Jack's other personality traits such as a quick temper or irrational, impulsive, and over-controlling behaviour are thus the products of his unresolved Oedipal process – his weak, unstable super-ego and unsettled omniscience complex. When Jack falls into depression because of his tragic error, the source is again an unresolved Oedipal process that shapes his

flawed character. Finally, when Jack returns to the island and takes on the mission of detonating the bomb and later replacing Jacob, it is because of his unstable need for paternal authority, which drives his fluctuating, fragmented identity.

By drawing attention to the links the show establishes between the roots of Jack's disintegrated self and the conflicts of his childhood arising from his father-complexes, I argue that *Lost* reaffirms and refashions Freud's orthodox view of family and subjectivity enshrined in his theory of the Oedipus Complex. The series conforms to the Oedipal myth that perpetuates the belief in the father's vital role in his son's character formation starting at infancy and continuing into adulthood. In her 2002 paper entitled "Deconstructing Oedipus," Susannah Izzard suggests that, "despite the Oedipus complex being less central to studies of human growth and development, it is a powerful force in the shaping of gender and sexual identity – not because it is an accurate representation of a stage in childhood, but because of its cultural pervasiveness and power" (1). By pointing to its cultural permanence, Izzard suggests that the Oedipus complex remains a lens through which we view our relationships with both others and ourselves. *Lost's* ideological commitment to this psychoanalytic myth can be viewed as symptomatic of its cultural pervasiveness today; it suggests the inability to look outside of the Oedipus complex.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In her article, “*Cast Away and Survivor: The Surviving Castaway and the Rebirth of Empire*,” Rebecca Weaver-Hightower gives *Robinson Crusoe* (Daniel Defoe, 1719), from which the castaway narrative springs, as an example to tales that depict the island life as benign and in this way legitimize colonization (indigenous people often joining the castaway as Friday does Crusoe). She gives the island film *Castaway* (Robert Zemeckis, 2000) as an example the type of narrative that depicts the island as unwanted/disowned: “although it adapts many of the typical elements of the castaway story, *Castaway* differs in one significant respect in that although Chuck adapts to island life, he never really *settles* his island in the sense that generations of literary castaways did” (296-7).

<sup>2</sup> The term *tabula rasa* appears in Locke’s *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690) where he describes the human mind as a *tabula rasa* or ‘blank slate.’ In Locke’s conception, this means that the human mind begins as a blank slate and comes to form an understanding of the world through simple sensory experiences, which form larger, more complex ideas and thoughts about the world.

<sup>3</sup> Christian gives this advice to Jack not in a fatherly manner, but in a domineering and menacing way. The choice of mise-en-scène reinforces his authoritative image: he is sitting on a spacious black sofa in the middle of the room filled with an irritating silence. Even the ticking sound creates discomfort in the viewer, transmitting Christian’s commanding power. He is holding a glass of whiskey and constantly stirring the ice in it, making his superior position and hierarchy even more perceivable.

<sup>4</sup> In “A Tale of Two Cities” (2006) the doubting Jack bursts into the room where his father is having a group meeting and calls him to account for his early remark in front of everyone: “What did you tell them dad? That your son never really had it? Not like the old man? I didn’t have the will to make it work – my life, my job, my marriage?” In another episode, “The Lighthouse” (2010), Jacob (Marc Pellegrino) persuades a reluctant Jack to take a trip to the Lighthouse with Hurley by luring him with the same remark: “you have what it takes.”

<sup>5</sup> Here I talk about the symbolic absence of Christian in Jack’s adult life since his physical presence does not guarantee his symbolic efficiency. As I emphasized in my introduction and literature review, the father’s power resides intrinsically in his title/symbol. As Bruce Fink writes, “the father is granted a position of authority not so much because he is a ‘true master’ – a truly authoritative, brilliant, or inspiring figure who commands total respect – but simply because he is the father and is expected to take on the functions associated (in many people’s mind) with ‘father’” (81). With the decline of the paternal function, the father loses his symbolic role and title, and therefore is open to criticism and judgment. Jack questions his father’s authority more often than not, and since he has lost his symbolic function, Christian can never attain a high status in the eyes of Jack. He becomes no more than a rival whom Jack tries to surpass on every occasion.

<sup>6</sup> It was actually Man in Black disguised as Christian. He probably knew that using Locke to relay a message from him in Christian’s form was the only way to convince Jack to go back.

# 4

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## **IN SEARCH OF A PATERNAL SUBSTITUTE: JOHN LOCKE AND THE NEED FOR FATHER'S AUTHORITY AND GUIDANCE**

John Locke (Terry O'Quinn) opens his eyes on a tropical beach. He is lying in an arbitrary sprawl on the ground with a gash on his face. As he lifts his head, he realizes that he is in the midst of an airplane crash: whirling jet engine noise and fuming debris fuse with the hysterical screams and shrieks of people calling out in desperation. He soon shifts his attention from this havoc to his feet, as he takes notice of his toes wiggling. For a moment, he focuses on his wiggling toes and examines them in disbelief while turning his head wonderingly up to the sky for a divine explanation.

Before Oceanic Flight 815 crashed on the island, Locke was unable to walk and was confined to a wheelchair. He had travelled to Australia for an adventure in the outback after having his heart set on living in the wilderness and undergoing many physical challenges for spiritual renewal. However, when he arrived for the planned tour, the organizers told him that he could not participate because of his paralysis and sent the angry and bitter Locke home on the Oceanic Flight. While flying from Sydney back to Los Angeles, his plane unexpectedly crashes on a deserted island which offers him not only the fulfillment of his dream to engage in a survival expedition but also the miraculous healing of his legs.

Following the crash, Locke gradually emerges as a leader in competition to Jack, positing his knowledge of wilderness survival techniques against Jack's more pragmatic medical skills. He knows how to track footprints, hunt and skin wild boars, often providing the survivors with fresh meat and sources of protein. He also knows how to accurately predict the weather and sudden downbursts of rain, and manages to retain a sense of direction even in thick bush. "He understands and reveres the island," as Lynnette Porter writes, praising its natural beauties and supplies, in what others perceive "as mysterious ways" (194). His close relationship with the island often gives him confidence that other members of the group find reassuring. For example, Charlie Pace (Dominic Monaghan), one of the survivors, declares early on in the narrative, "if there's one person on this island I would put my absolute faith in to save us all, it would be John Locke" ("Hearts and Minds" 2005).

However, contrary to his self-assured and confident image on the island, Locke, as we learn through flashbacks, retains a meek, feeble, and insecure side to his personality. In his past life, he worked as a clerk in the toy section of a department store, a home inspector, and a regional collections supervisor for a box company, and was therefore doomed to minimum salaries and the constant criticism and humiliation of odious bosses such as Randy Nations (Billy Ray Gallion). He had a depressed and lonely life, having phone sex to alleviate his loneliness. He was also subjected to many deceptions and cons by his own biological father who was absent for most of his life, which caused his self-esteem and confidence to diminish substantially. Locke's existence in his past life as a weak, naïve, and gullible man who is a follower rather than a leader is



nicely summarized when one character in his past refers to him as “amenable for coercion” (“Further Instructions” 2006).

How did this shy and unassertive lowly worker turn into an aggressive and self-assured leader? What happened with the crash of the Oceanic Flight that miraculously transformed Locke from an insecure, helpless figure to a figure of wisdom? While the answer to these questions might spur various responses, the most obvious reason for Locke’s sudden transformation stands as the island, *who* gives him the feeling in his legs back and also offers him the chance to engage in a walkabout, something he thought was his destiny. Early on in the narrative we learn that before crashing on the island, Locke was a crippled man bound to a wheelchair for the rest of his life – it is not until the third season that we find out his paralysis was actually caused by his father, an act which symbolizes his paternal tragedy through the physical demonstration of his father’s cruel impact on his life. It is only when he arrives on the island that Locke can walk again, miraculously recovering from the paralysis that the doctors thought was irrecoverable. He interprets this transformative experience as more than explainable by fact or logic, attesting it to a celestial power at work. This interpretation determines the direction of his quest on the island, whereby he gradually develops a spiritual bond with the island, embracing it as the source of divine power.

Locke’s past essentially provides the fuel for his allegiance to the island. If he had not been a weak and helpless figure in need of love, care, and guidance in his previous life, he probably would not have cultivated such a strong tie with the island. Terry O’Quinn also points to this idea while commenting on Locke’s character:

I always thought he [John Locke] was a man desperately seeking faith, not that he had faith ... I think what drove him was the need for it. If he could simply find something to connect to, something to hold onto, and I think that's what he was always after. (*Lost: The Final Journey*<sup>1</sup>)

Locke's unshakable faith in the island grows out of his need for a supportive father figure. He clings to the island in an attempt to fulfill his unmet paternal needs such as protection, guidance, and purpose in life. The absence of his father becomes the underlying cause of his emotional instability and insecurity; it becomes the reference point for his confounded devotion to the island. In particular, Locke's struggles to stay on the island and defend it from external threats can be traced to his strong desire to reclaim his lost father-son relationship by developing an affinity with the island as a father-surrogate. In this chapter, I take an in-depth look at John Locke and explore his inflated need to believe, which seals his destiny on the island, by linking his belief to the circumstances of his father's absence. My analysis is comprised of three sections: the first section, with a focus mainly on the first season of the show, investigates how Locke's past crises spill into his present leadership, in particular, how his father's absence paves the way for his acceptance of the island as his father surrogate; the second section further develops his island affection by examining how this affection gradually assumes a religious dimension as Locke starts worshipping the island and blindly adheres to the ideas of fate and destiny in what seems to be a plea for psychological security; and the third section explores his self-sacrifice and murder, paying specific attention to the similarity of his death to Christ's, all the while considering how his death is sparked by his humble obedience to the island as his father surrogate.

Through a psychoanalytic interpretation of Locke's character, I demonstrate how, by centralizing Locke's experiences around his father's absence, *Lost* perpetuates the mythic construct of the father/Oedipus complex. In doing so, I argue that, the series assumes the traditional Freudian perspective on male personality development. Unlike Jack, whose narcissistic personality emerges as a result of his father's symbolic absence (though physical presence), Locke's personality characteristics emerge as a result of his father's physical absence (though symbolic presence), which result in Locke's continual quest for fulfillment through an ideal father image. I also suggest that Locke's need for his lost father is mimicked by the show's narrative, which evokes the conventional need for stability, continuity, and order through its fragmented and complex plot structure.

### **Locke's Search for Paternal Guidance:**

#### **The Island as a Father-Substitute**

John Locke is a confident and independent leader with a firm loyalty to the island, yet his moments of doubt and fear arising at critical times on the island manifest a skin-deep and brittle courage and faith. Whenever he is exposed to stress and pressure, or cannot find the answers he is looking for from the island, Locke discloses his weak, doubting, and fearful side. He cries. Jack, Boone, and Charlie encounter him many times in the jungle, crying bitterly into his arm, shouting, and railing against the island. His tears emanate from his fear of losing his path and purpose in life again. They demonstrate his unstable, shifting personality and dissonant character. Like Jack, Locke's identity is fragmented between courage and weakness, faithfulness and skepticism. As Tess Forrest contends, this vacillation marks the absence of the father: "Without father's grip and a relative sense of his own grip, he [the son] vacillates between feelings of impotence and

omnipotence, between impulses of passive surrender and aggressive domination” (91).

When thwarted or disappointed, Locke shows an intense emotional reaction, whereby his confident, self-assured character is temporarily subjugated by his insecure, skeptical character, as evident in his moments of doubt, rage, and depression on the island.

This angry, helpless, and self-doubting Locke is not a surprise for the viewer (as much as for his fellow survivors who are not allowed to see the roots of his personality), who gains insight in the feeble self of his pre-island life through flashbacks. Locke’s flashbacks, like those of Jack, primarily function as revelatory knowledge, providing a framework for understanding his actions and dilemmas on the island. As Roberta Pearson notes, “they delineate [Locke’s] desperation that led to such fervent commitment to the island, and to such excessive despair when ... he believes that the island has let him down” (153). The flashbacks establish Locke’s pre-island character as a weak, pathetic, and nearly invisible man who received government assistance for his depression and had phone sex in an attempt to alleviate his loneliness. By presenting his pre-island persona in contrast to his island character, the flashbacks juxtapose his two contrasting personalities, allowing the viewer to compare and contrast: the nervous, hesitant, and humiliated Locke who was bound to a wheelchair with the competent, strong warrior he is now. In this way, the flashbacks display and augment Locke’s fragmentation of identity.

For example, in “Walkabout” (2004), the first season episode where John Locke emerges as a competent hunter in charge of finding food for the group, the flashback segments depict him as an “office drone planning to do a rugged Australian wilderness walkabout” (Mittell, “Film and Television Narrative” 168). In this way, the flashbacks display the discrepancy between the humble, incompetent pre-island Locke and the island

Locke as a skilled hunter. Moreover, in order to heighten this discrepancy, the episode unravels a shocking plot twist at the end where the viewers learn about Locke's state of paralysis for the first time. In the flashbacks, as Mittell writes, "Locke repeatedly rebuffs people telling him that he is not fit to do the walkabout by exclaiming, 'don't tell me what I can't do' – a sentiment that we read as responding to concerns about his age or lack of experience" until it is revealed in the episode's final flashback, when the camera angle abruptly shifts, that Locke was unable to walk prior to the crash (169). Suddenly all perceptions we have of Locke – that he is a physically superior and competent survivor – fall away, as the discrepancy between the past Locke and the present Locke widens in unforeseen ways. This new information forces us to go back in our memory to try to re-interpret what we have seen so far, but now armed with the knowledge that Locke was a crippled man before he came on the island. With this formal strategy – what Mittell calls "complex focalization" (170) – the show delineates Locke's character fragmentation and indicates that his former pathetic existence was preparation for his present position on the island.

The plot twist that reveals Locke's paralysis prior to the crash also prepares the viewer for the magical and miraculous occurrences on the island. As Mittell writes, "once revealed, it makes sense within *Lost*'s quasi-mystical storyworld that Locke's paralysis would be cured by the crash" (170). In this way, the island becomes more than a simple deserted land (as it is for most of the other survivors, who are exempt from the knowledge of Locke's healing). In the episode "White Rabbit" (2004), Locke professes to Jack his belief that the island is a special place:

I am an ordinary man, Jack. Meat and potatoes. I live in the real world. I am not a big believer in magic. But this place is different. It is special ... I have looked into the eye of this island, and what I saw was beautiful<sup>2</sup>.

The island repairs Locke physically, but more so spiritually by offering him a chance to repair his broken identity. As Nikki Stafford notes, “where the island has been everyone else’s hell, it is Locke’s salvation ... it has freed Locke [and turned him into a new man] baptized on an island that has given him a second chance” (*Finding Lost* 28). Locke’s transformative experience provides the fuel for his willingness to embrace the island as his new father surrogate. He projects his need for paternal function onto the island by displacing his unresolved Oedipal conflict onto the island as the substitute object. He expects the island to compensate for his unmet paternal needs by providing him security, protection, guidance, and a greater purpose in life.

The correlation between Locke’s father and the island is demonstrated plainly in the episode “Deus Ex Machina” (2005) through the parallels drawn between his past relationship with his father and his current attachment to the island. In his flashback story, Locke endeavors to reconnect with his late-found father who concocts a scheme to convince him to give up his kidney. This story is paralleled on the island as Locke endeavors to reconnect with the island *who* does not help him in his efforts to open the hatch door and to regain the feeling in his legs. As the episode draws to a close, the connection between his father and the island as his new father-surrogate becomes clearer when the two story worlds are intricately interwoven with the music in the flashback segment, spilling into the island narrative. The music conveys the same sense of disappointment and frustration Locke felt years ago about his father to his present

experience with the island. Locke desperately bangs on the window of the hatch, feeling betrayed for the second time, and yells: "I've done everything you wanted me to do. So why did you do this?" Suddenly a light shines through the window and gives Locke new hope and purpose. Unlike his father who tells him to "let go" in the flashback, the island continues to care for Locke providing him the confidence and security that he needs. He loses his father in the flashback, but finds the island instead. This view is also supported by the title of the episode, "Deus Ex Machina," which is a phrase "applied to any unanticipated intervener who resolves a difficult situation" (Cuddon 237). The island becomes the *deus ex machina*, the means for Locke to resolve his tangled familial tragedy and to re-invent himself with the renewed purpose and meaning the island as a father-substitute offers him.

Locke's former character (as well as his present character on the island) has largely been determined and shaped by his father's absence. Writing on the effects of absent fathers on abandoned sons, Dennis Balcom contends that men who experience father loss always feel as if something deeper is missing with a sense of an imperfect and "unfinished self." Tess Forrest also notes that if the son lacks a positive interpersonal experience with the father, he can develop "no idea of who he might become as a separate person" (92). Assuming a Freudian perspective on male development, these writers concur in the belief that abandoned sons have difficulty in forming unified and coherent identities due to the taunting presence of the feelings of lack and deficiency. Reinforcing their perspective, *Lost* demonstrates, through Locke, that the lack of a father plays a fundamental role in generating identity problems. According to the Oedipus complex, the father has a vital role in separating the son as an infant from his symbiotic

relationship with his mother. He is the one who enables the son's entrance into the private world and subsequent construction of a unique identity by educating him to adopt a realistic perception of himself and to develop a clear and integrated self-definition. Therefore, his lack results in a corresponding difficulty "in the emergence of a differentiated self from the primary undifferentiated self" (Carvalho 343). Without the integrative agency of his father, Locke experiences trouble in forming a stable identity, and just like his competitor Jack Shepherd, develops a disintegrated and distorted self-image that constantly vacillates, as Forrest writes in terms of the narcissist, between feelings of weakness and strength, fear and confidence, and timidity and authority (91).

In the absence of his father, Anthony Cooper, Locke cannot complete his separation-individuation process – a fundamental element of the Oedipal model of development in order to be situated as an independent, autonomous subject. As I have stated above, separation from the mother is crucial for the child to develop an awareness of the outside reality and himself as a separate entity. In the event of the father's absence, the normative separation-individuation process is impeded and the child is left "fixated at a pre-Oedipal level of development" (Jones 46). In Lacanian terminology, the pre-Oedipal stage is the imaginary, where the child remains unable to separate himself from his image. Without the paternal function, the child cannot complete his transition from the imaginary to the symbolic/Oedipal, as the father who initiates this transition is non-existent. Due to his father's absence, Locke is left in the imaginary stage, unable to locate himself in the outside realm, the realm of paternal authority ("The Law of the Father"), where he can acquire (at least) an illusionary sense of an autonomous, unified self. Moreover, stuck in the imaginary stage of development, he forms a fragile self-structure



and deficient self-esteem. As Žižek writes, the subject who is trapped at the imaginary stage because of the absence of paternal authority perceives “everything as a potential threat to his precarious imaginary balance” (*The Ticklish Subject* 368). It is evident in Locke’s temper tantrums and outbursts that he has a fragile imaginary self, so even a tiny incident that endangers his tenuous balance causes him to have sudden feelings of rage which are usually directed at himself. For example, in the episode “...And Found” (2005), in a moment of confession, Locke tells Sun, who is angrily tearing apart her garden, that he too used to be angry and frustrated all the time because he was in search of “something.” He was in search of his lost father with the hopes of passing onto the symbolic stage where he could construct an integral and cohesive self-representation.

From the flashbacks, we know that Locke continuously sought for a father figure in his pre-island life in an attempt to find a place in the symbolic (“The Law of the Father”). Even before coming to the island, where he found the ultimate father figure he yearned for, Locke was unrelentingly looking for a paternal substitute to fill the void left by his father. For example, in “Further Instructions” (2006), his participation in a commune life is clearly an attempt to regain the father he lost (or never had) with the hopes of rejuvenating his broken self. In an unspecified time after his father’s deception, Locke finds a commune, which he experiences with heightened emotions: he feels that he has finally found the warmth and care of a family that he has yearned for. He thanks God for helping him come to terms with his anger, and more importantly for providing him with a ‘real’ family. His tumultuous internal balance finds firmness and security in the stability of a family. His search for a father becomes analogous to a search for guidance, socialization, and dependability enshrined in the unit of a family. However, the commune

soon turns out to be growing and trading marijuana under the guise of a big family. They do not hesitate to disown Locke when they discover that the hitchhiker he brings to the camp is an undercover cop who has been gaining evidence for their illegal acts.

Once again abandoned and alone, Locke is left with the absence of a secure ground, struggling to find meaning and direction in his life. This time he clings to the dream of a walkabout with the hopes of finding the spiritual wholeness and independence he needs. In the episode "Cabin Fever" (2008) the dejected Locke is visited by a mysterious man while recovering in the hospital after his paralysis, and is told that his survival from an eight-storey fall is a miracle that should spur him into going on a walkabout for a period of self-discovery. According to this mysterious man, Locke needs to live in the wilderness for a period of time and undergo an inner journey to find out who he really is. This new idea of self-discovery sounds especially appealing to Locke, who has been disheartened and depressed by his father for the second time, and helps him transfer his need for meaning to his urge for a walkabout. In this way, his search for a father takes the form of a search for a fulfilling spiritual renewal.

In his pre-crash life, Locke's every attempt to find a father-substitute results in failure. Crashing on the island offers him the experience he has sought in an Australian walkabout and the miraculous healing of his legs, as Locke gladly welcomes the chance for a new beginning. His past essentially provides the fuel for his willingness to embrace the island as his father surrogate. As Balcom writes, the abandoned son might deal with the grief of losing the father by idealizing and worshiping the absent father. He can base his worship on the actual father through over-identification with him, or create a fantasy father to whom he can cling in an attempt to repair his father wound. In his pre-crash life,

Locke refuses to see the 'real' Cooper, and worships him in spite of his apparent lack of commitment and interest. On the island, he takes refuge behind an idealized image of his father and embraces the island as an exalted father that he hopes will fix him by healing his broken self and providing him a new purpose to construct a new identity for himself.

It is also important to draw attention to how Locke's search for a father is mimicked by *Lost*'s complex narrative structure. Just like Locke, the series constantly tries to construct purpose/meaning amidst disparate information, linearity out of erratic narrative temporality, and coherence in spite of the ever-growing fragments. It does not (or, maybe cannot) present a straightforward rectilinear narrative where meaning (and notions of subjectivity) is presented as stable and coherent. Instead, it establishes a complex, cryptic story world by breaking from traditional narrative structure and conceptions of time, and adding new revelations to the central enigmas while opening up new mysteries in each episode. In this way, the show makes it difficult to reach a unified meaning by never providing complete answers to questions, and constantly raising new narrative enigmas. What stands out about *Lost* is that with its intricately woven and continuously dislocating narrative, the series is able to mirror the position of its own characters on the island: their fragmentation of identity, dissonance of character, and so on. By manipulating our idea of coherent reality, it demonstrates the impossibility of attaining consistent and unified identities in an age where the illusory promise of stability and unity has largely been dissolved with the decline of the belief in the traditional father, and left subjects alone in their struggle for meaning and truth.

In Lacanian theory, the father occupies a position as a Master Signifier. Namely, it fixes the slippage of signification and produces consistent meaning, thereby forming a

stable symbolic order. As Žižek notes, this signifier has a transcendental function: while all other signifiers are caught in the web of signification searching for meaning through their relationship to an endless number of signifieds, the Master Signifier does not fluctuate because it refers only to itself, hereby producing stable and coherent meaning “out of free-floating dispersion of signifiers” (*Enjoy Your Symptom!* 102). Within its fixed position, the sliding of signification and the flux of meaning come to a halt. In the absence of his father, it becomes increasingly difficult to find evidence of a Master Signifier in Locke’s life. Likewise, in the absence of a conventional narrative structure, it becomes increasingly difficult to find a Master Signifier in the text of *Lost*. Various internet blogs, forums, and websites manifest the need and search for this fixed signifier, as evident in fans’ efforts to stitch together bits and pieces in order to create a comprehensive, unified, and orderly meaning of the show. Just like Locke, these fans may feel lost without the illusion of fixedness this self-referential signifier provides and feel the urge to find it in an attempt to construct stable and unified selves. As fandom scholar Cornel Sandvoss reminds us, “fandom is not an articulation of inner needs and drives, but is itself constitutive of the self. Being a fan in this sense reflects and constructs the self” (48). As I suggested in my literature review by drawing on Žižek’s theories, in the post-competitive capitalist order where images and imaginary ideals take over the traditional role of the father, being a fan becomes a way of expression and construction of the self. Our endeavors to make meaning out of disorder and complexity (incited by the collective desire to find the Master Signifier) can be seen as underscoring our need to form firm and resolute subject positions in a world where chaos and indeterminacy dominate.

## **Locke's Island Worship:**

### **Faith, Fate, and Destiny**

In his book *Coming of Age in American Fiction*, Kenneth Millard remarks on the father-child relationship as an important element in the coming-of-age novel, as the father ensures the young protagonist's entry into the society, and thereby his socialization. He contends that the search for a real father in the novels he analyzes takes many forms, but ultimately transforms into a search for a lost spirituality. The yearning of the protagonist for a role model acquires an "explicit religious dimension" (15). In a similar respect, Locke's attachment to the island as a father-surrogate eventually assumes a religious dimension, as the island becomes a divine presence, a God-like figure for him<sup>3</sup>. Locke believes that the island speaks to him through dreams, visions, and supernatural signs. As Christian Piatt notes, Locke's obsession with signs and divine instructions "drives him constantly to seek evidence of that into which he invests his faith" (82). For Locke, nothing occurs in vain or there is no purposeless conduct; everything happening on the island "must be incorporated forcefully into his existing paradigm" (82). Every event must fit into a preordained plan determined by the God-like agency of the island. This makes Locke excellent at fabrication – he rationalizes his dreams as holy signs and justifies every happening, even deaths, as fate. For example, in the episode "Deus Ex Machina," Locke leads Boone to his death when he asks him to go up into the plane perched on top of a canopy in the jungle. When the plane falls from the canopy, Boone is mortally injured and dies thereafter. Locke is quick to rationalize his death as a sacrifice the island demanded so he could fulfill his destiny. His belief system does not, as Piatt

argues, “allow something as significant as Boone’s death to be a senseless loss, or merely a consequence of careless curiosity” (82).

Due to his blind faith and determinism, Locke usually comes into conflict with the rational and pragmatic head of the *Lost* survivors, Jack Shepherd. In contrast to Locke, Jack “maintains a willful reliance on logic and reason, unwilling to accept any answer for the fantastic occurrences on the island other than those based on common sense” (Piatt 64). A memorable scene in “Exodus, Part 2” (2005) conveys the disparity between these two characters and sets up their ‘man of faith’ and ‘man of reason’ battle. After Jack rescues Locke from being dragged into a dark hole by the smoke monster, they have the following exchange:

JACK: Look, I need for you -- I need for you to explain to me what the hell's going on inside your head, John. I need to know why you believe that that thing wasn't going to...

LOCKE: I believe that I was being tested.

JACK: Tested?

LOCKE: Yeah, tested. I think that's why you and I don't see eye-to-eye sometimes, Jack because you're a man of science.

JACK: Yeah, and what does that make you?

LOCKE: Me, well, I'm a man of faith. Do you really think all this is an accident? That we, a group of strangers, survived. Many of us with just superficial injuries. Do you think we crashed on this place by coincidence? Especially this place? We were brought here for a purpose, for a reason, all of us. Each one of us was brought here for a reason.

JACK: Brought here? And who brought us here, John?

LOCKE: The island. The island brought us here. This is no ordinary place, you've seen that, I know you have. But the island chose you, too, Jack. It's destiny.

Locke believes that there is a greater purpose behind the plane crash, that they are brought to the island for a reason unknown to them. Jack denounces this idea vehemently, and neither side concedes for several seasons. Their conflict (and the conflict between the notions of faith and reason in general) carries into the second, third, and subsequent seasons, constantly raising doubts in the viewers' minds about what to believe, fate or free will.

However, when in the fifth season the over-rational, pragmatic Jack turns into a man of faith, the ideas of fate and destiny evidently overthrow the ideas of reason and science. It is a well known fact that fate and destiny have been an indispensable part of the show from the very beginning. Since Locke told Jack, after saving him from falling down a sharp cliff in "White Rabbit," that he should consider the possibility that everything happening on the island happens for a reason, the ideals of fate and destiny emerge as over-arching themes in the series. They have been a major driving force of knowledge ("are the survivors on the island because it is their destiny?" is a question that is never answered within the show) by giving meaning to otherwise unexplainable mysteries and to the actions of the characters in the show. For example, if a character acted in a certain way, or made a decision he/she thought was vital, the best way of rationalizing that action or decision would be to say "I am supposed to do this." In this way, the character could eschew the burden of explaining the motives behind his/her actions and could attribute them to an abstract, impersonal sense of predestination.

Therefore, what the characters are supposed to do is proposed as a foundationalist claim, giving meaning and explanation to the complex island life.

Despite the series' concentration on postmodern fragmentation and heterogeneity, the ideas of fate and destiny present themselves as a stable and centralized element of the plot and as a grand narrative upon which the whole premise of the show is based.

Assuming a role very much like the father as Master Signifier, fate and destiny serve as a reference point that stabilizes the disparate and chaotic knowledge in the show. In his book *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens explains that in the postmodern environment of chance, risk, and chaos, where "the inevitable concomitants of a system geared to the domination of nature and the reflexive making of history," belief in the notions of fate and destiny have prominently diminished, yet they have by no means disappeared entirely (109). Just like the father who has been murdered but still exists as a mythic image, fate and destiny are still preserved in postmodern society as a means of providing a secure ground and stability to the contemporary subject's fluctuating life experience. In *Lost*, the notions of fate and destiny serve as an anchor for both the characters and the audience's search for lost meaning. Various television and internet promos as well as merchandise for *Lost* foreground the idea of fate as one of the show's vital elements. For example, the back cover of the third season DVD claims: "Find your fate, find yourself," clearly equating fate with the stability of subjectivity. The constant search for the notion of fate that the castaways engage in throughout the show invites viewers to partake in a similar desire for stable subject position and meaningful life experience, hinting at the lingering desire for the symbolic father.



As his devotion to the ideas of fate and destiny deepens, Locke's character gains a darker side. With his blind belief that everyone on the island is there for a reason, Locke refuses to let anyone leave, taking the duty of defending and saving the island from both the inhabitants and intruders. In order to fulfill his duty, he blows up the Flame Station, the castaways' only hope of communication ("Enter 77" 2007), and later on the submarine Jack is going to use to get off the island ("The Man from Tallahassee" 2007). Overstepping his boundaries, he murders Naomi Dorrit (Marsha Thompson), the head of the crew of the freighter, after an apparition of Walt tells him to stop her ("Through the Looking Glass" 2007). However, far from assuming responsibility for his actions, Locke interprets his every action as the fulfillment of orders he receives from his father deity, unobscured by the fact that he might be wrong<sup>4</sup>.

Locke's affection toward the island as his father-substitute is so powerful that it overrides his attachment to his own biological father, whom he attempts to kill as a sign of his ultimate submission to the island's will. In the episode "The Brig" (2007), Benjamin Linus (Michael Emerson), the leader of the Others, compels Locke to kill his father (who 'magically' turns up on the island) to show his readiness and willingness to become a part of their community. He tells Locke that he cannot be of service to the island until he releases himself from his father's hold:

You're still crippled by the memories of the man you used to be before you came to this island, and you'll never be free until you release the hold that your father has over you... I can't show you anything until you can show me that you're ready and willing to be one of us... That's why you're going to have to kill your father.

Ben lays down as a condition that Locke must kill his father as “a gesture of free will, of commitment” to the island. He does not believe that Locke actually has the potential to do it until he shows up one day carrying his father’s dead body to their camp – Locke cannot do the deed directly, but accomplishes the murder indirectly through Sawyer (Josh Holloway). Locke’s sacrifice of his father in the service of the island raises interesting parallels to the biblical story of Abraham who affirms his unconditional submission to God’s authority when he consents to sacrifice his one and only son for Him. As Žižek notes, Abraham never questions the content of God’s demand (“How can He demand of me something so atrocious?”) and offers his son to prove his undoubting faith (*Enjoy Your Symptom!* 84). According to Žižek, this is how symbolic authority of the father and God works: their words are taken as the guarantee of the truth, irrespective of their content (95). Just like Abraham, Locke develops an undoubting faith, never questioning the (cruel) content of the island’s messages and signs. In a reversed version of this biblical story, he sacrifices his own father as a sign of his commitment to the island, and this becomes the mark of his ultimate submission to paternal (God/the island’s) authority.

Locke’s unshakeable faith in the island grows out of his need for a supportive father figure. He interprets it as having a special relationship with the island and conceives of every happening in terms of fate because he needs to repair his broken self by finding a secure ground (such as belief in a divine power or destiny) to anchor his existence. Giddens notes that “a sense of ‘fate’ whether positively or negatively tinged ... relieves the individual of the burden of engagement with an existential situation which might otherwise be chronologically disturbing” (133). Locke’s fatalistic vision (evident in his frequent bawling, “This is my destiny. I am supposed to do it”) becomes a way for

him to cope with his father's absence. When he treats matters as above and beyond his control (attributing them to fate), he relieves himself from the pain of questioning what has happened to him. In this way, his fatalism provides him (at least an illusory sense of) psychological security and compensation.

Freud wrote extensively on the association between psychology and religion, making implicit links between the human father and God. As I mentioned in my literature review, he speculates in *Totem and Taboo* that the elimination of the primal father created a sense of guilt and remorse in society that transformed into a longing felt for him. After a long lapse of time, this longing for the father made it possible for an ideal to emerge which embodied the power of the primal father. As a result, human individuals fabricated father-deities as a way to replace their ancient father (505). According to Freud, "the psycho-analysis of individual human beings ... teaches us with quite special insistence that the god in each of them is formed in the likeness of his father, that his personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father in the flesh and oscillates and changes along with that relation, and that at the bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (504). Freud views the idea of God as being a version of the father image. God is nothing more than the elevation of the father who has been lost and yearned for. Applying Freud's perspective to Locke's communion with the island, it becomes obvious that Locke satisfies his yearning for a father by setting up his own religion and creating his island-deity as a projected image of his own father. His special bonding with the island is a wish-fulfillment, an attempt to control his unresolved Oedipus complex and reconcile with his father.

As a contemporary interpreter of Freud, Kristeva extends Freud's views on religion and psychic structure. She states that "faith could be described, perhaps rather simplistically, as what can only be called a primary identification with a loving and protective agency" (24). Through this kind of identification, Kristeva believes, destabilized subjects seek stability (Mercer 252). Belief in a universal agency helps them reinvent a coherent and a unified self, providing a basis for identity and outlook. Locke's identification with the island as a divine agency appears as a response to his lack of paternal authority. He clings to the island in an attempt to stabilize his turbulent identity through his unshakable belief in fate and destiny – that there is only a single path to follow and that nothing is arbitrary and ambiguous. By having a strong conviction even to the extent of sacrificing other people on the island, Locke tries to regain the lost meaning and direction in his life.

### **Locke's Self-Sacrifice and Death**

When Benjamin Linus turns the frozen wheel to move the island in "There's No Place Like Home, Part 2" (2008), the survivors remaining on the island find themselves randomly travelling through time, which is indicated by a bright flash. Locke volunteers to leave the island and go to the outside world in an attempt to stop the erratic flashes and save the island even though he knows beforehand that it will result in his death. In the episode "This Place is Death" (2009), Locke descends into the Orchid station to turn the frozen wheel back on its axis and move the island for the second time. There he encounters Christian Shepherd (probably an impersonation by the Smoke Monster<sup>5</sup>) who tells him that after turning the wheel, he will be transported to the outside world where he will have to die in order to bring back his fellow survivors who have left the island. In an

imperious manner, he tells Locke: “that’s why they call it a sacrifice.” Nevertheless, Locke agrees to turn the wheel and is transported back to the real world to fulfill his destiny.

In the outside world, Locke attempts to contact those who have previously been on the island, yet fails in his efforts to convince them to return to the island. Depressed by his failure, he intends to commit suicide as he knows that his self-sacrifice is a predestined fact, but instead he is unpredictably murdered by Benjamin Linus. Locke’s self-sacrifice corresponds closely with the death of Jesus, especially with respect to the atonement theology adopted by many to explain his crucifixion. According to Piatt, the atonement theology understands the death of Jesus as an atonement for the sins of humanity (86). His death is justified as a necessary sacrifice “to restore God’s honor in response to the offense born by humanity’s sinfulness” (87). In a similar way, Locke’s self-sacrifice becomes an atonement for the sins of other survivors who have left the island in spite of his pleas. He consents to die to make them return so that the island can be restored to its previous condition. The analogy between Locke and Christ is also manifest in the publicity photo ABC released prior to the show’s finale featuring the *Lost* cast in a recreation of Leonardo da Vinci’s *The Last Supper*. As Nikki Stafford notes, in this photo, “various alternate shots put characters in different positions and fans went nuts trying to analyze why the characters were sitting in specific spots, in particular poses” (*Finding Lost – Season Six* xiii). Looking at the photo, we see that the most prominent figure in the center is John Locke, taking the seat of Jesus from the original painting. An obvious implication of this image is that *Lost* establishes Locke as a Christ-like figure, who will become everyone’s savior.

From the beginning of the first season, when viewers discover, with a mixture of astonishment and admiration, that he miraculously regains his ability to walk, Locke appears to be more than just a common castaway. As the show implies throughout its narrative and publicity photos such as the one I mentioned above, Locke has always been “extremely special” because of his unequaled connection to the island. In particular, that he resurrects in a Christ-like manner at the beginning of the fifth season after being brought to the island in a coffin becomes the ultimate sign of his holiness. That is, until it is revealed that “the man who looked like Locke was a supernatural being who was borrowing his physical form, and John himself was gone forever” (Stafford, *Finding Lost* – Season Six 28). Namely, the Smoke Monster takes Locke’s corporeal body (as well as his thoughts and memories) as a part of his plan, whereby he, in his struggle with Jacob, uses Locke’s body in order to win other people over his side. In “The Last Recruit” (2010), the Smoke Monster tells Jack that the reason he chose Locke’s body was because Locke “was stupid enough to believe he had been brought here for a reason, because he pursued that belief until it got him killed, and because you were kind enough to bring him back here in a nice wooden box.” As the Smoke Monster ruthlessly reminds us, Locke has never been special. What he believed as an exceptional bond with the island was a reality he created in his own mind rather than an empirical truth. His self-sacrifice for the island, too, was an attempt to re-create God the Father’s holy relationship with his son Jesus so that he could take refuge behind a fantasy which was clearly a desperate search for the love, guidance, discipline, and emotional support denied to him by his father absence.

Locke has always been gullible from the beginning. In his past life, he trusted his father and lost one of his kidneys and his ability to walk. On the island, he trusted various people such as Walt, Christian, and Richard (all of whom were either embodied or directed by the Smoke Monster), did various deeds, and in the end agreed to sacrifice himself only to be murdered by Benjamin Linus. Beneath his strong, self-assured facade, Locke has always been an anxious and insecure man. He never really overcomes the feelings of low self-esteem and timidity as a result of his father's absence. He continuously searches for a paternal substitute with the hopes of finding the inner peace and stability he lacks until he finally finds the island as the ultimate fruit of his search and embraces it as his new father surrogate. However, his unrealistic idealization of the island turns him into a blind follower, which eventually brings his own destruction. Locke's quest for the father, which never reaches a definitive end during his lifetime, becomes the badge of his character, shaping his objectives and actions both in his pre-island and island life.

As Luigi Zoja writes, "the father, after all, is an entirely cultural construction. He is a product of society, and society – albeit at a very slow pace – can modify him and change the forms in which he appears" (296). As I have argued throughout my thesis, fatherhood is essentially a cultural construct, an ideology presented as a fact or necessity. Likewise, the need and search for the father should be considered as culturally-driven rather than naturally satisfied. Locke's hunger for his father, which orients his perception of both the world around him and his own image, is a reflection of *Lost*'s reliance upon the culturally persistent myth of the father. By constructing Locke's character around the

absence of his father, *Lost* confirms the persistence of the psychoanalytic myth of the Oedipus complex that views the father as the central constitutive element of the psyche.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> "Lost: The Final Journey" is not a part of the island narrative, but a clip show that aired before the *Lost* series finale on May 23, 2010. It was designed to provide a retrospective look back over the past six seasons of the show, including episode commentaries from the cast and crew of *Lost*.

<sup>2</sup> It is worth pointing out the connection between Locke and his namesake: the philosopher John Locke (1632-1702). While the critical and popular interpretations of their connection vary, this quote seems to directly point to the fictional Locke's empiricist philosophy. The philosopher Locke is commonly regarded as the father of British empiricism and his philosophy is largely premised on the valuing of sensory experience as it is rationalized by the mind. In his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he posits that the human mind is a 'blank slate' that is written on by sensual perception and experience, and ultimately, these experiences, as they are rationalized, come to form one's understanding of the world. This seems to be exactly what is suggested in his brief quote. Coming to the island has changed Locke's perception of the world as, through his senses, he has come to appreciate the supernatural character of the island, unlike Jack, who clings to a rationalist, scientific understanding of the island that prevents him from understanding these supernatural elements.

<sup>3</sup> As Sarah Clarke Stuart notes, the writers and producers of the show Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse confirm this idea in an interview aired during the final season when they say: "We substituted the phrase 'the island' for the word 'god'" (qtd. in *Literary Lost* 55).

<sup>4</sup> In this case, Locke was right in his belief that Naomi and her crew came to the island with bad intentions (which included finding Benjamin Linus and killing the rest of the people on the island). However, time and time again, he was wrong, even though he truly believed that he was doing the right thing.

<sup>5</sup> The Smoke Monster, or more properly the Man in Black, has the ability to masquerade as other people on the island. He takes the form of the body of deceased individuals, frequently Jack's father, Christian Shepherd, like he does in this very scene. By disguising as other people, the Smoke Monster demonstrates the cultural constructed-ness of all characters, particularly the father figure, when he takes the form of Christian.



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## CONCLUSION

Jack Shepherd and John Locke are the two competitive leaders of the *Lost* island, each dealing with a failing father-son relationship and suffering from its adverse influence on his personality development and interpersonal skills. The fact that Jack and Locke share similar paternal issues makes them closely connected to each other, so even when they have a fierce rivalry defending absolutely contrasting ideas, they share more than they are actually aware of. Both are fragile and vulnerable, continually tormented by the lack of an inner balance and coherence. In the absence of their fathers, both suffer from a profound sense of insufficiency and low self-esteem, and desperately try to prove their self-worth: Jack does it through constant achievements while Locke through his belief that he is a special/Christ-like person meant to do important things on the island. Because of their low self-esteem, even a tiny event that endangers their fragile inner balance or risks their security is enough to turn them into obsessive, angry men which is in contrast to the image they give of themselves: for Jack a natural leader and a self-less hero, and for Locke a competent survivor and a fearful leader. Reminiscent of the fragmented narrative structure of the show, John and Locke exhibit fragmentation of identity, constantly oscillating between the conflicting and contradictory experiences of themselves.

Jack and Locke's similarities become more apparent as Jack turns into a man of faith, finally taking the "leap of faith" Locke insistently asks for. Jack begins to believe in

the notions of fate and destiny after all his heroic attempts to save people from the island prove unworthy and his belief that he was working for the greater good prove wrong. In an attempt to restore his self-worth, he cultivates faith in the island, something he vehemently denounced before, believing that his new faith will help him reconstruct his broken self – just like Locke does when he first crashes on the island. In this way, Jack and Locke get on the same page, eventually seeing “eye to eye,” as both cling to the ideas of fate and destiny in their desperate attempt to regain their lost fathers.

Finally, Jack and Locke’s similarities culminate in their having the same fate. Both sacrifice themselves and die tragically for the service of the island that they have come to idealize as an elevated father. However, their death does not bring a full resolution to their quest on the island. Neither does it bring a conclusion to their character development that has been progressing (although sometimes with regressions and reversions) since the first season. When they die, the questions concerning their development – if they were able to heal their broken selves, construct for themselves a new identity, or resolve their father issues – remain unanswered. Likewise, questions concerning their belief in the notions of fate and destiny – if they were brought to the island for a purpose, and if they were special people supposed to do important things – remain narratively unresolved. When they sacrifice themselves for the sake of the island, we do not know if they die for a purpose. For this reason, their deaths open up new questions rather than answering the narrative enigmas the show has created in their past and future stories.

Television necessitates a dispersed, unstable, and fragmented viewing, “relying on proliferation rather than plenitude, perpetual deferral rather than fulfillment” (Flitterman-

Lewis 166). However, when it comes to *Lost*, it is more so: the narrative thwarts a straightforward plot structure, continually creating tension, suspense, and conflict; the characters are perpetually open to change, constantly shifting on the scale of good and evil, making any identification with them momentary. In his blog, where he engages in a critical analysis of *Lost*, Pearson Moore uses the compass, symbolizing direction and orientation, as a symbol of the series' open-ended and circular narrative. He writes that, "as with many common cultural artifacts," the symbol of compass "was shaken, inverted, and twisted into something entirely new for the purposes of our more complete understanding of *Lost*." As Moore elaborates, "the history of the compass began in 1954, when Locke gave the compass to Richard as proof that he was from the future. Seven years later, Richard showed the same compass to five-year-old Locke. Richard carried the compass until 2007, when he presented it to the grown up Locke, who could convey it back to 1954 so it could be handed off to Richard." The disorientation, complexity, and circularity exemplified by the compass represent the larger narrative of *Lost*: it follows a circular route whereby multiple plots cross, entwine, merge and diverge, refusing to follow any single and linear path with a clear beginning and ending, thus making the possibility of reaching any fixed, unified meaning very slim.

The characters as well as the themes of the show reflect this circular narrative: they are open-ended, continually frustrating viewers' desire for narrative closure. Being one of the most prominent themes of the show, father issues never reach a true resolution because the characters with father complexes such as Jack and Locke are left in doubt – we are not sure if they display growth, or a satisfying redemption from their past at the end. Just like the circular motion of the compass/narrative, Jack and Locke are involved

in circularity whereby they repeat the same mistakes while striving to reconstruct themselves. At the end, they return to where they have started, which is the origin of their character: the father. In terms of characterization, Jack regresses to his old, aggressive self, obsessed with delusions such as “saving the world,” while Locke repeats a gullible mistake and is deceived by the Smoke Monster about leaving the island to sacrifice himself in the real world.

### **The Sixth Season of *Lost***

#### **And the Return to the Father**

*Lost*'s complex, circular narrative prevents a true and full resolution of its on-island narrative, but the show still tries to reach a sense of resolution in the last season through flash-sideways. After presenting the backstories of various characters through flashbacks and at the end of the third season introducing the flash-forwards, the writers give us the flash-sideways in the sixth season, creating, as Stafford writes, “an entirely new narrative line that had fans speculating about the characters as if they were strangers to us and we’d somehow been transported back to season 1 again” (*Finding Lost – Season Six* v). For a narrative that continually creates conflict, tension, and suspense, the flash-sideways further complicate things by recounting the stories of the castaways in a parallel world, and therefore raising many more questions about the significance of this new narrative technique in the series’ overall narrative. In an interview by Lorne Manly in 2010, Carlton Cuse states that “we view each season of the show like a book in a series, and so last year was the time travel book, and that story had a beginning, middle and end. This season is significantly spiritual. We felt the mission of the final season of the show was to bring the show full circle.” As Cuse makes clear, the sixth season,

particularly the flash-sideways timeline, is intended to offer a spiritual conclusion rather than any full resolution of the island's mysteries (unanswered questions, plot holes, and so on). The focus remains on the characters and bringing an end to their spiritual journeys on the island.

As a way of concluding the six-season-long quest of the castaways, the flash-sideways revisit the past themes and issues, offering the castaways a final chance to resolve the pervading and painful circumstances of their pre-island lives. Joanne Morreale also talks about this in her article on *Lost*: "as characters are 'awakened' from the parallel world to remember their lives on the island, they (and we) see a condensed version of the important moments in their relationships throughout the past six seasons" (181). By reflecting on what has come before through the flash-sideways, the show suggests that a sense of conclusion is impossible without coming to terms with the past. A true reconstruction of the self is feasible only through reconciliation with the father. In this way, it emphasizes (once more) the crucial role of the family and childhood experience in psychology, development, and ultimately in sealing the destiny. By doing so, I argue that the show reinforces its conservative attitude in relying on the fundamental role of family and father in construction of the self.

What function the flash-sideways serve is not revealed until the show's closing episode. When the first episode of the last season premiered on February 2, the Oceanic flight 815 with the same group of passengers survived the turbulence and landed safely in Los Angeles. Jack, Kate, Hurley, Locke, and many of the passengers from the original flight looked identical to the first time we met them in the first season, but avoided the traumatic crash. In a number of fan sites, devoted viewers of the show developed theories

about what the flash-sideways timeline meant, if it was an alternate reality as a part of the time travel theme, or a ‘what if’ scenario as a way to show the events that would have happened if the *Lost* survivors had not crashed on the island. The show did not confirm any of these assumptions until the finale, when it was revealed that the sideways world was actually a metaphysical place where the characters met after death. It is a place where, in their afterlife thoughts, the castaways can change the traumatic memories of their past and imagine themselves a universe to heal their permanent wounds and attain peace. It is also a place where they can release themselves from the past burden and by “letting go” of their obsessions pass onto the next world. In this realm, everything is a wishful thinking about the past, a reflection of the lives the castaways would want to live.

For Jack, the sideways world is an opportunity to resolve his lingering father issues. At first, everything seems identical to the time before Jack crashes on the island in the first season: he is still a surgeon at St. Sebastian, his father dies in Australia in the same way, and Jack flies there to bring back his coffin. However, as the flash-sideways unfold, Jack is revealed to be a father to a son named David. In the beginning, their father-son dynamic mirrors Jack’s own with his father, in terms of fear and poor communication<sup>1</sup>. But, later on, Jack adopts a mild and loving attitude towards his son and the two heal their relationship. Jack’s dream of becoming a father and having a positive, conciliatory relationship with his son can be read as a reflection of his desire to work out his father issues. Even in his dream world, Jack defines himself in opposition to his father (by taking on the role of a good, caring father) and remains indebted to his Oedipal wounds. He treats David the same way as he would have liked to have been treated by his father when he was the same age. In a significant moment (that parallels with an early

childhood memory with his father), Jack tells David that he has “what it takes” to succeed in life, that he can never fail in his eyes and he will never stop loving him (“The Lighthouse” 2010). Jack supports his son in a way his father never did. He therefore plays out the scenario of the caring father he wished his father had been to him. In the afterlife, Jack’s last wish concerns his reconciliation with his father and attempts to repair his Oedipal memories of him.

For Locke, too, the sideways world is an opportunity to come to terms with his father issues. He imagines a plane crash caused by himself that results in both his father’s severe condition and his own paralysis from the waist down. As he tells Jack in “The Candidate” (2010), when he receives his private pilot’s license, he wants his father to be his first passenger. His father is terrified of flying, but Locke promises him that there will be no problems. The plane barely gets off the ground when it crashes, leaving his father in a vegetative state and himself with the guilt and remorse. Even if Jack offers him a chance at recovery, Locke refuses to undergo any surgery because he has come to accept his paralysis as punishment for causing his father’s condition. Locke’s afterlife thoughts serve as a way for him to heal the wounds that his deceitful father has inflicted on him. He imagines his father powerless and dependent, putting him in his own shoes, but treats him with concern and empathy, the way he would have liked to be treated in real life. His responsibility and guilt for putting his father in an irreversible state is a reflection of his wish that his father had borne the responsibility for his own actions. Therefore, in the sideways world, both Jack and Locke’s central concern is their fathers and the possibility of coming to terms with them. They both fantasize about being in their fathers’ roles and behaving the way they would have liked to see their fathers behave towards them. While

the flash-sideways are not as fully developed as the early island narrative, it is apparent that Jack and Locke's unresolved Oedipal issues with their fathers remain as strong mental constructs in their unconscious minds, as reflected through their dream worlds.

Jeff Jensen writes in his column "*Lost* Finale Recap" that Jack and Locke are the two characters that "cling most tightly to their sideways world." That is because the lives they create for themselves offer a balm for their most painful memories of their fathers. Locke's awakening happens when he regains the feelings in his toes after the operation, as he suddenly remembers the memories of his life on the island. Jack's awakening, the last and the most supreme one, happens only when he touches his father's coffin. Images from the island rush past his mind as Christian appears from behind and explains to him that they are all dead and he needs to "let go" of the past to join his friends in their journey to the afterlife. The father and son embrace and exchange their love for each other. Jensen notes that Christian had told Jack many times before that "he did not have what it took to be a hero because he did not know how to let go. It hurt Jack to hear it back then," but this time without feeling angry or resentful, Jack embraces this truth and makes peace with his father. His long-awaited confrontation and reconciliation with his father becomes the final requirement of his afterlife journey.

Christian is not only a crucial part of Jack's sideways world and his means to move on to the afterlife, but also a significant character for both the other survivors and the *Lost* viewers as a whole. True to his name, Christian Shepherd becomes a spiritual guide and informant for the castaways in their afterlife. Just like a shepherd protecting and guiding his flock, he leads the castaways to their final journey. He also leads the viewers through their journey, explaining and giving meaning to the ideas/themes they



have been watching for the past six seasons. He becomes, in a sense, everybody's father, or point of reference, providing answers, and ensuring stability and coherence. With him, *Lost* completes its six season narrative and marks a return to the origins: the father

### **A Final Reflection**

*Lost* begins its narrative in the first season with Jack Shepherd, who emerges as a reluctant hero tormented by a complex and competitive relationship with his father. After its six season run, *Lost* ends its narrative in the same way, by returning to Jack's father complex, the genesis of his turbulent identity, and finally reconciling the father and the son as a way of concluding the story of not only Jack but also the rest of the survivors, and the show as a whole. In this way, the show emphasizes the centrality and circularity of the father figure in its narrative, since everything begins with the father (as he is the only one who initiates our entrance into culture and participation in society) and ends with the father (as he plays a crucial psychological role in determining our destinies)<sup>2</sup>. Hence, despite its portrayal of fathers as predominantly failed, weak, and impotent, who are stripped of their traditional role and function, *Lost* highlights the underlying importance of the father as a mythic construct in both characterization and storytelling. As I demonstrate through my analysis of Jack and Locke, while the show calls into question the all-powerful, knowing, wise and moral father image, at the same time it seeks to reinstate the myth/symbol of the father found in the Oedipus complex as an essential constituent of subjectivity. In this way, I argue that *Lost* displays contradiction and ambiguity, two defining features of postmodern representation. When Žižek writes, "what characterizes postmodernism is ... an obsession with the Thing," I like to interpret that *Thing* as the symbolic father who provides the illusion of stability and regulation in

our lives. As Žižek explains, “we enter postmodernism when our relationship to the Thing becomes *antagonistic*: we abjure and disown the thing, yet it exerts an irresistible attraction to us” (123). When applied to *Lost*, postmodernism’s contradictory position becomes evident in the show’s treatment of the father: it plays down his traditional role and function, de-emphasizing the signs of dominance and authority, but also clings onto a conventional understanding of him by emphasizing the characters’ constant search and yearning for a paternal ideal.

In this thesis, I was interested in drawing attention to the show’s conventional inclination amidst its fragmented, instable, postmodern character representations and narrative development. I wanted to demonstrate how *Lost* reinforces the ideology of the mythic father enshrined in the Oedipus complex and therefore perpetuates the psychoanalytic tradition by predicating its narrative and character development on this timeless archetype: the need and search for the father. In an interview by Jeff Jensen in 2007, Carlton Cuse, in a way, verifies my argument when he points to the mythic origins of the characters in the show: “I think, mythically speaking, all great heroes have massive daddy issues. Hercules. Oedipus. Luke Skywalker. Indiana Jones. Spider-Man. It all comes with the territory. We dig flawed characters on *Lost*, and a large part of being flawed is the emotional damage inflicted on you by your folks” (“Daddy Dearest”). By suggesting that *Lost* follows a long literary tradition by making use of the theme of dysfunctional parenting (a common motif found in all forms of storytelling from Greek mythology to popular culture) as a central element of narrative, Cuse accepts that *Lost* preserves the powerful myth of the father. When you dig out the survivors’ personality problems and identity flaws, father complexes spring up as the underlying cause. Every

mystery about a castaway can be traced back to his/her childhood environment and the genetic history of family. Thus, in *Lost*, the underlying image of the father in Western society (reified by Freud into the theory of the Oedipus complex) prevails as a dominant myth, recast in a post-traditional, fragmented, and dislocated setting.

*Lost* does not only manifest the persistence of the father archetype within the televisual constructs of its own narrative, but also in contemporary society as a whole. By adhering to the mythic importance of the father in its character development, the show makes apparent the postmodern world's enduring ideological commitment to the father as a symbolic function. Paul Frosh writes that even though television is physically very limited – a small, self-contained box – it is, in representational terms, inexhaustible because it contains a whole universe: “television acts as the container of the multiple locales, individuals, homes, and communities that it depicts: the container, in effect, of the multifarious spaces and social relations that make up our sense of the social whole – on an increasingly global scale” (97). As a result, television provides a framework for commentary on society by containing it and neatly reproducing it in the confines of its own space. As a televisual text, *Lost* also offers a way to remark on the current situation of society: the show's perpetuation of the mythic father image indicates society's lingering need for the father. Despite the ever more conspicuous absence of fathers and the continuing decline of paternal authority, the father ideal/myth remains effective and surprisingly present today. In the same way, the Oedipus complex as the embodiment of this ideal remains a powerful force in the shaping of our view of family, subjectivity and also the structure of society.

As Luigi Zoja suggests, “the father’s authority has yielded to the principles of democracy, and his power in many ways waned; but our unconscious does not eliminate in a few generations what has dominated it for millennia. Despite its loss of fathers, and even if probably now in transition toward a new and different configuration, Western society, at least unconsciously, remains patriarchal” (4). On an individual level, the father is dead (evident in the growing discourse of ‘fatherlessness’ emerged at the center of debates over poverty, welfare, teenage delinquency and so on), but on the collective level, the Father, the archetype that is spelled with a capital letter symbolizing stability, authority, and discipline, still dominates and is constantly appealed for. As Zoja makes clear, “The absence of the father in the present-day world holds only one certainty: the need to continue to discuss it, and to search for him” (293). As long as Western society remains largely patriarchal, the mythic construct of the father (in our collective conscious) will persist, and continue to permeate cultural and televisual representations, even without the knowledge of the producers/writers.

Jeff Jensen, an *Entertainment Weekly* writer who has made exhaustive readings of *Lost* and developed a broad array of theories, makes an insightful comment about the show which, I believe, provides a good framework for concluding my thesis. He suggests that *Lost* “is an allegory about a new millennia yearning for a new hope but still haunted by the despair of the era past; about a culture burdened by the crushing weight of our dead fathers and forefathers” (“Daddy Dearest”). The show can be read as an allegory for the contemporary era, a meditation on the in-between status of the post-traditional social order that overturns collective assumptions, beliefs, and ideals, but still yearns for a return to traditions and old values; a social order that celebrates its liberation from

hierarchies and constraints, but still retains a nostalgia for the past; a social order that searches for the father (as a salve for psychological wounds) while undermining him. The show's in-between status is physically manifested through the island's liminality: it is a place between Australia and America, civilization and wilderness, presence and absence, and constantly shifting through space and time. The survivors caught between the two worlds represent the contemporary subjects that hesitate between the modern search for foundations and absolutes and the postmodern suspension of preconceived conceptions of subjectivity, meaning, and truth.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In the beginning of the episode "Lighthouse" (2010), when Jack picks up David from his school and later goes home and tries to have a conversation with him, David refuses to talk, saying they only have to see each other once a month and they should just "get through" it. Later, when Jack goes to see his mother, she points out that David might be scared of him as he was of his father, Christian.

<sup>2</sup> In contrast to fathers, mothers in *Lost* are predominantly presented according to their biological function and do not play a central role in shaping the personality traits and/or identity development of the survivors. It is worth pointing out that in the final season of *Lost*, the show introduces a mother figure, who seems to be the Mother of life on the island. Known as 'the Mother,' this character is presented as a part of Jacob and Man in Black's (the island's two ageless dwellers) history. She predates all the known life on the island, and thus becomes the originator of life, from whom both good and evil come into being. In contrast to the mythological existence of the Mother in the show, the father figure is presented as more down-to-earth and present (although mostly physically absent), dictating the actions and decisions of the characters on the island over the show's six seasons.

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“Namaste.” Written by Paul Zbyszewski and Brian K. Vaughan. Dir. Jack Bender. 18 March, 2009.

“Orientation.” Written by Javier Grillo-Marxuach and Craig Wright. Dir. Jack Bender. 5 October, 2005.

“Stranger in a Strange Land.” Written by Elizabeth Sarnoff. Dir. Paris Barclay. 21 February, 2007

“Tabula Rasa.” Written by Damon Lindelof. Dir. Jack Bender. 6 October, 2004.

“The Brig.” Written by Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse. Dir. Eric Laneuville. 2 May, 2007.

"The Candidate." Written by Elizabeth Sarnoff and Jim Galasso. Dir. Jack Bender. 4 May, 2010.

"The Incident." Written by Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. Dir. Jack Bender. 13 May, 2009.

"The Last Recruit." Written by Paul Zbyszewski and Graham Roland. Dir. Stephen Semel. 20 April, 2010.

"The Life and Death of Jeremy Bentham." Written by Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. Dir. Jack Bender. 25 February, 2009.

"The Lighthouse." Written by Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. Dir. Jack Bender. 23 February, 2010.

"The Man from Tallahassee." Written by Drew Goddard and Jeff Pinkner. Dir. Jack Bender. 21 March, 2007.

"There is No Place Like Home, Part 2." Written by Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse. Dir. Jack Bender. 29 May, 2008.

"This Place is Death." Written by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz. Dir. Paul Edwards. 11 February, 2009.

"Through the Looking Glass." Written by Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. Dir. Jack Bender. 23 May, 2007.

"Walkabout." Written by David Fury. Dir. Jack Bender. 13 October, 2004.

"Whatever Happened, Happened." Written by Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. Dir. Bobby Roth. 1 April, 2009.

"White Rabbit." Written by Christian Taylor. Dir. Kevin Hooks. 20 October, 2004.

"*Lost*: The Final Journey." Season Six recap. Narrated by Titus Welliver. 23 May, 2010.